

BREAKING FREEDOM'S CHAINS: LOCKEAN LIBERAL
AND COUNTER-TRADITIONS IN AMERICAN EDUCATION
FOR FREEDOM

By
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This historical and philosophical study first examines the overwhelming influence of the Lockean liberal idea of freedom in American education. After the publication of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1690, the Lockean liberal notion of freedom quickly gained expression in literature and found great favor among liberal interpreters of the Bible. In order to understand the full extent of the Lockean liberal influence, extensive recourse is made to political philosophy, literature, and theology. Lockean liberalism consists of three central tenets: that freedom is the natural estate of humanity, needing no development; that freedom is essentially antithetical to all social organization; that a psychology of radical individualism best describes human nature. This Lockean liberal notion

of freedom has been institutionalized in public education, and it shuts down discussion of freedom because freedom is assumed from the beginning.

Next an investigation of the various counter-traditions of freedom is made. Examining the various understandings of freedom held by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Dewey, and Maxine Greene, we find a series of related understandings of freedom all in strong opposition to the Lockean liberal tradition. These nineteenth and twentieth century American models of freedom all posit the need for the active development of freedom through various forms of education. None of the above mentioned thinkers claim that freedom is humankind's natural estate.

In the end, I conclude that an adequate education for freedom must take at least three directions. First, American history must be re-visioned so as to stress that contemporary life is open to the cooperative restructuring of communities. Second, great breadth of experience is required. Narrow and abstract education cannot provide an adequate base upon which to build any sort of freedom. Third, I conclude that a greater use of metaphorical language, as opposed to the literal, would contribute to the ability of all people to see the world as requiring their active participation.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEMS OF
FREEDOM AND EDUCATION FOR FREEDOM

The question, in brief, is whether democracy and freedom are values to be preserved or threats to be avoided. In this possibly terminal phase of human existence, democracy and freedom are more than values to be treasured, they may well be essential to survival.

—Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*

What is freedom? Could such a common term as this be difficult to explain? Perhaps our frequent and thoughtless use of the word causes some hesitation in the formulation of a response. But how could we not know what we mean by such a word?

Most writers on the subject find little need to explain what they mean by "freedom." John Bury in his *A History of Freedom of Thought* merely says that free thought is "the refusal of thought to be controlled by any authority but its own."¹ Herbert Muller takes the task of defining freedom more seriously in his *Freedom in the Ancient World*, saying that by freedom he means "the condition of being able to choose and to carry out

¹John Bury, *A History of Freedom of Thought* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1952), 10.

purposes."² He explains that by choice he means freedom from coercion. Further, Muller distinguishes his idea from those conceptions of freedom that include acting virtuously, serving God, or being perfectly rational.³ And though Muller's examination of the meaning of freedom is concluded on the same page it begins, by distinguishing one meaning of freedom from others he, thereby, admits that the word has been variously understood.

Richard McKeon in "Freedom and History: The Philosophical Controversies and Ideological Conflicts" takes up seriously the notion that the word "freedom" has been given various and conflicting meanings. McKeon, primarily an historian of philosophy, says that "variant concepts of freedom are implicit in the various conceptions of history, and they vary according to the same principles as determine the species of history and the forms which each of these species assumes."⁴ In this text, McKeon makes explicit three fundamental species of history, each with its corresponding conception of freedom: dialectical, logistic, and problematic.

Mortimer Adler in *The Idea of Freedom: A Dialectical Examination of the Conceptions of Freedom* recognizes the great variety of understandings that freedom has borne throughout western history. Early in this text Adler says, "The question 'What is freedom?' has elicited the widest diversity of answers. It is a familiar fact that the literature of this subject abounds in divergent or conflicting definitions and that the word

²Herbert Muller, *Freedom in the Ancient World* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), ix.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Richard McKeon, "Freedom and History: The Philosophical Controversies and Ideological Conflicts," in *Freedom and History and Other Essays: An Introduction to the Thought of Richard McKeon*, ed. Zahava McKeon (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1985), 188.

'freedom' is used in a multiplicity of senses."⁵ Adler proceeds to group each concept of freedom under one of three rubrics. He distinguishes the various kinds of freedom by the "way" in which they are possessed: "(i) only under certain favorable circumstances, (ii) by those alone who have acquired a certain state of mind or character, (iii) by all men innately, i.e., in virtue of their human nature."⁶

Thus, with no clear agreement about the concept, it would seem to serve some good purpose to examine the meaning of the word "freedom." We cannot merely assume agreement upon the understanding of the term among writers on the topic of freedom. Especially in the United States, we seem all too ready to presume our freedom. And this freedom is typically claimed to have its basis in laws that protect the individual's natural liberty from the unnecessary interference of others. John Dewey dismisses this view: "The belief that thought and its communication are now free simply because legal restrictions which once obtained have been done away with is absurd."⁷ Maxine Greene says that

celebrations of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights continue, but day after day their complex affirmations dwindle into slogans. . . . Stunned by hollow formulas, media-fabricated sentiments, and cost-benefit terminologies, young and old alike find it hard to shape

⁵Mortimer Adler, *The Idea of Freedom: A Dialectical Examination of the Conceptions of Freedom* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1958), 18.

⁶*Ibid.*, 39.

⁷John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Denver, Colorado: Alan Swallow, 1927), 168.

authentic expressions of hopes and ideals. . . . What does it mean to be a citizen of the free world?⁸

In short, freedom is not always well understood, much less adequately lived. There are, as the authors we have traced make clear, numerous ideas of the nature of freedom. We can find them especially in the writings of various philosophers. And if we begin to search through these various concepts of freedom we could rather quickly find a relatively small number of them that have, over the history of the United States, entered into the American dialogue on the subject.

What has this talk of freedom to do with education? Quite simply, the various conceptions of freedom that have contended throughout American history control the ideas of education for freedom. That is, different concepts of freedom require that differing forms of education be provided in order that citizens may enjoy that particular form of freedom. Not all forms of education for freedom are equally efficacious in preparing persons to live within the various ideas of freedom. For instance, the current and long-lasting domination of the "Lockean liberal"⁹ notion of freedom, with its basis in God-given liberty to self-determination, has severely limited the relation of education and freedom. If we are all free by the grace of God, as Locke presumes, then the appropriate role of

⁸Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 3.

⁹I have chosen to use John Dewey's term to refer to a set of political ideas that are central to American culture: a radical individualism, the belief that freedom is innate, and the belief that individual freedom is antithetical to all forms of social organization. This notion of Lockean liberalism is detailed in Dewey's *Liberalism and Social Action*, in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 11: 1935-1937, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987). See especially pages 6-9.

government is one of safe-guarding that natural freedom. And education is largely otiose with regard to freedom; education would be limited to instructing students that they are free in and of themselves and that to retain freedom, government must be strictly limited. On the other hand, a notion of freedom like that of John Dewey demands that education actively take up the task of forming the free citizen through education. For Dewey, freedom includes the following traits: "intellectual initiative, independence in observation, judicious invention, foresight of consequences, and ingenuity of adaptation to them."¹⁰ Dewey assumes no God-given freedom and expects that only through an active educational endeavor to instill initiative, ingenuity, foresight, and so on, will persons actually be capable of living their freedom. It should be obvious that Dewey's understanding of freedom requires a radically different sort of education for freedom than does traditional Lockean liberalism.

Lockean Liberalism

John Locke, commonly considered the father of political liberalism, claimed that freedom is essentially a power that all men have when left to do as they choose. Locke claimed that "the *Idea of Liberty*, is the *Idea* of a Power in any Agent to do or forbear any particular Action, according to the determination or thought of the mind. . . ."¹¹ Locke's concept of freedom

¹⁰John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1944/1916), 302.

¹¹John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. with an introduction by Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) bk. II, chap. xxi, § 8. In Locke's time it was common for authors to capitalize words and employ italics almost arbitrarily. Also spelling had not been

has come to be understood as a call for a *laissez-faire* attitude on the part of government toward the actions of its citizens. The United States Constitution with its minimalist accounting of the role of government is a classic liberal document. Liberalism has become such a dominant feature in the whole of western civilization, and especially in America, that the liberal notion of freedom must be thoroughly addressed if one is to understand freedom in this country.¹² Understanding the inadequacies of the concept of Lockean liberal freedom as it has been commonly understood in America over the past two hundred years is a central problem for any project of education for freedom.¹³

Though currently the term liberalism is associated with the philosophy of John Locke, the first use of the term in the English language to designate a particular system of political philosophy came late in the history of the term, in 1819.¹⁴ Just as with the use of the word freedom, the word liberalism has carried various meanings and connotations during its history. Liberalism has been used to refer to the religious liberation of Protestantism during and after the Reformation. It also has been used to

standardized. In this and all future references to Locke's writings, I have chosen to retain Locke's language in all its original peculiarities.

¹²John Garrarty and Peter Gay, eds. *The Columbia History of the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972; reprint, Dorset Press, 1981), 883.

¹³We should notice that what is here being called Lockean liberalism in many ways resembles current American "conservative" political ideas. And though contemporary conservatives like Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich might object to their ideas being called "liberal," political history justifies the usage of the term. Political philosophers use the term "classical liberalism" to mean eighteenth century bourgeois liberalism, a position closely related to Lockean liberalism.

¹⁴*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "liberalism".

describe Puritan individualism, the political and economic grounds for the growth of capitalism, and the resulting political atmosphere after the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 in England, among other things.¹⁵ Yet, by focusing on the writings of Locke one finds a fairly distinct set of assumptions and problems that are commonly agreed to circumscribe the main body of political liberalism.

At the broadest level, within this textual perspective, individuals are viewed as naturally free, rational, and equal and are assumed to have an interest in their preservation, their liberty, and their property. The pursuit of these interests in the absence of a superintending authority leads to the prospect of a dire situation . . . , a state of war. Liberal political institutions profess to avert this prospect by articulating the basis for such a superintending authority and justifying the constraints it imposes on human freedom and . . . on natural rights by reference to the rationally accessible interest of each individual which such authority would secure.¹⁶

We should notice immediately that, indeed, all governmental institutions that have as their goal the preservation of liberty, equality, and property (and these are for liberalism the only legitimate uses of state power) are, of necessity, limitations on natural freedom. Thus liberalism requires the exercise of state power be minimal and only for the preservation of an already existing liberty, equality, and property. The first hallmark of liberalism is the assumption of a pre-existing state of natural freedom, equality, and rationality. This is an assumption concerning human nature. Second, state power must be limited in quantity as well as

¹⁵Uday Singh Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in Locke's Political Thought* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), 80-1.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 81.

limited in the works it may undertake. This claim of limited government power is based upon Locke's view that governmental power is strictly derivative; power is contractually yielded over to government by individual persons. And since no one willingly yields all their power so as to become a slave, people hold ultimate power and sovereignty, not government. Third, preservation of property and of rationally agreed upon means for its transfer and acquisition is a legitimate use of state power.

There are yet more basic assumptions underlying those already mentioned. For Locke there is a theology that provides the grounding of his psychology of freedom, equality, and rationality. Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* is, perhaps, as much concerned with theology as with government. The *First Treatise* argues from a strictly biblical basis concerning the appropriate form of human governance. Locke develops his theses of the natural freedom, equality, and rationality of man based on his reading of the Bible. This theological ground has in the twentieth century been largely removed from liberalism and been replaced with one based in the social sciences. We no longer need turn to the Bible for an explanation of the fundamentals of human nature; modern psychology now provides them.

We easily find within the literature on freedom and education the Lockean liberal concept of freedom. It has managed to survive among scholars and laymen alike. The respected philosopher of education Paul Nash, in his book *Authority and Freedom in Education*, claims that no one is free who is dependent upon another person. Thus young children dependent upon their mothers and university students dependent upon

their teachers are not free.¹⁷ Voluntarily accepted family responsibilities also involve a loss of freedom for Nash.¹⁸ Thus we find at the core of Nash's thought a Lockean assumption of a natural state freedom. This natural freedom implies that human beings are essentially autonomous, and the responsibilities of communal life are seen as limiting this state of natural freedom.

In the more popular writing of Admiral Hyman Rickover, *Education and Freedom*, we find freedom reduced to having the technical know-how required to remain free from domination by the Soviet Union. Rickover presumes that Americans are already free and that the problem of freedom resides in threats to the preservation of freedom rather than in creating a nation wherein freedom could grow. Again, just as for Locke, there is the presumption of a natural freedom preceding all community or social life. Education for freedom, for Rickover, is technical education that grounds American technological superiority over other nations.¹⁹ We cannot believe that Lockean liberalism has ceased to exercise substantial influence over the American understanding of the nature of freedom.

Purpose of the Study

The public debate over the nature of freedom in this country has been to a significant extent closed down; it is, for the most part, confined to a

¹⁷Paul Nash, *Authority and Freedom in Education: An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), 8.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹Hyman Rickover, *Education and Freedom* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1959).

small number of academics. Current popular discussion of freedom lacks depth, and this lack of depth is due, in large part, to a lack of education concerning the nature of freedom. Education for freedom is a necessary condition for a revivification of the public discussion of freedom and, therefore, for the construction of a true democracy. The contemporary political philosopher Michael Sandel says that "American politics has lost its civic voice."²⁰ Sandel points to two contemporary American crises that contribute to our current malaise: loss of self-government and the erosion of community.²¹ Others agree with Sandel's assertion. Noam Chomsky says that even bringing the ideas of "All-American" thinkers like Thomas Jefferson and John Dewey into the present discussion is difficult. "When you read them today, they sound like crazed Marxist lunatics. That just shows how much our intellectual life has deteriorated."²²

Neither Adler nor McKeon make reference to a possible connection between the various ideas of freedom and the American project of education for freedom. This study will examine the various ideas of freedom that have contended within the American dialogue on freedom and explain their ramifications for education for freedom. The predominance of the Lockean liberal idea of freedom has had tragic results; by assuming freedom to be a natural trait, it makes the whole question of freedom un-problematic; debate is shut down. Not all concepts of freedom

²⁰Michael Sandel, "America's Search for a New Public Philosophy," *The Atlantic Monthly* 277, no. 3 (March 1996): 57.

²¹Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, The Belknap Press, 1996), 3.

²²Noam Chomsky, *Secrets, Lies and Democracy* (Tucson, Arizona: Odonian Press, 1994), 16.

are supportive of extensive education for freedom, and the particular ideas of freedom logically entail various directions for education for freedom.

This study will demonstrate the dominance of the Lockean liberal understanding of freedom and how it has come to dominate education for freedom. Also, it will examine the continuing counter-tradition of education for freedom that, though largely unrecognized, resists Lockean liberalism.

Methodology

Methodologically, this study will engage in a philosophical reflection. Though there is no method peculiar to philosophy, there are some common activities in which philosophers engage. These include striving for clarity, the use of rational methods of argumentation, and the careful analysis of claims. Throughout the study there will be a striving to clarity of meaning. Philosophers cannot presume common understanding; rather, it is such understanding for which the philosopher must strive. Ideas will be analyzed and their constituent meanings and connotations explored so as to expose subtle connections, differences, and meanings. Causes of the popularity (or the lack of popular appeal) of the various ideas of freedom will be sought. Since this study takes up the real world problem of education, it will examine information and examples that are historically, socially, psychologically, literarily, and otherwise pertinent to the subject.

Prior Studies

A search of doctoral dissertations shows that the topic of education for freedom has not been popular. A look at American and Canadian dissertations going back to 1861 turns up fewer than twenty directly concerned with education for freedom. Most of these dissertations substantially limit the scope of their research to one or two main authors. Most recently, dissertations on education for freedom have looked separately to the work of Sartre, Dewey, Foucault, Giroux, or Greene. Little work has been done in comparing conceptions of freedom across the history of America. And no dissertation makes any substantial attempt to go to the historical predecessors of these more recent thinkers.

Books with promising titles, such as Rippa's *Education in a Free Society*, exhibit a singular lack of awareness of the problematic nature of freedom. Rippa's history of American education presumes that America is a free nation and presents a relatively uncritical account of the changes in education over the past 350 years.²³ In his *Democratic Educational Theory* Bayles claims that too much freedom results in anarchy; thus he seems caught up in the Lockean liberal assumption that regards human freedom as antithetical to social organization.²⁴ A substantially better book, *Education and the Democratic Faith*, by Sayers and Madden, takes up a Deweyan notion of freedom. In about eight pages, Sayers and Madden compare the relative adequacy of "cooperative" and "laissez-faire" concepts

²³S. Alexander Rippa, *Education in a Free Society: An American History*, 2d ed. (New York: David McKay Company, 1971).

²⁴Ernest Bayles, *Democratic Educational Theory* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 149.

of freedom.²⁵ A substantial background on Locke's notion of freedom is also presented, but the Transcendental critique of Lockean freedom as formulated by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau is absent. The existential contribution to the debate on freedom is presented in only four pages.²⁶

Organization of the Study

Though not an historical dissertation, this study generally will follow in historical progression through the various ideas of freedom. Since the predominant concept of freedom is the Lockean liberal one, the study will begin with the origins and fruition of Lockean liberalism. We will see the enormous influence that Lockean ideas have had and continue to have over thought concerning the idea of freedom. However, the Lockean liberal notion of freedom, though predominant, has not gone unchallenged. Already in the mid-nineteenth century Henry David Thoreau, in "Life Without Principle," would ask "Do we call this the land of the free? What is it to be free from King George and continue the slaves of King Prejudice? What is it to be born free and not to live free? What is the value of any political freedom, but as a means to moral freedom?"²⁷

²⁵Ephraim Sayers and Ward Madden, *Education and the Democratic Faith: An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), 57-64.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 217-220.

²⁷Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993), 365.

Thoreau postulates a moral freedom beyond the political freedom of Locke's liberalism. But, like the proverbial voice calling out in the wilderness, Thoreau was little heard. Thoreau's Transcendentalist colleague, Ralph Waldo Emerson, also has much to say concerning the nature of freedom.

The most developed critique of the liberal notion of freedom to appear in American philosophy may be that of John Dewey, who also provided a very different concept of freedom. And though Dewey was the leading American philosopher of his day, James Gouinlock claims that more recently he has been greatly ignored.²⁸ Dewey's critique of liberalism and his own conception of freedom have, ultimately, gained little place in the mainstream American practice of freedom. Still, Dewey's concept of freedom, which stresses the use of intelligence, and his view that the liberal idea of freedom is essentially concerned only with negative freedom, is an interesting and vital counterpoint in the American experience of freedom.

More recently there has been substantial foreign import of ideas concerning freedom into the American discussion of freedom. After the second world war, French existential thought, primarily in the person of Jean-Paul Sartre, brought another notion of freedom to the American dialogue. The popularity of Sartre's notion of freedom was in large part due to its close resemblance to the liberal notion. For Sartre we are free because of the ontological condition of the human being; we are incapable of being un-free. Thus, Sartre's understanding of freedom is open to many of the same criticisms as is Lockean liberalism. A more promising and

²⁸James Gouinlock, introduction to *The Moral Writings of John Dewey*, J. Gouinlock, ed., rev. ed. (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1994), xi.

challenging concept of freedom is presented in the work of Sartre's colleague and close friend, Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty recognizes that our ontological structure is merely the minimal condition for the possibility of freedom. Choice within social and natural contexts is a vital part of how we live our freedom. Merleau-Ponty says "I can botch my freedom only if I try to surpass my natural and social situation by refusing to take it up right from the beginning, instead of reuniting through it with the natural and human world."²⁹ This is a kind of active freedom that recognizes and requires our immersion within the larger social and natural milieu of the world.

Recently, Maxine Greene has constructed an able synthesis of Dewey's and existential ideas of freedom. She also has criticized the adequacy of the Lockean liberal idea of freedom. "To overthrow tyranny or authoritarian controls . . . is not to bring freedom into being; it is only to allow for the search."³⁰ And this search for freedom "cannot be conceived apart from a matrix of social, economic, cultural, and psychological conditions."³¹ Greene understands that freedom cannot be merely some innate ability to

²⁹Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1945), 520 and *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 456. [My translation.] All of the translations in which an original French language source is cited have been constructed after a rigorous comparison of the French originals with the English translations. As much as possible I have chosen to employ the available English translations. However, not all of the available English translations are of high quality. Colin Smith's translation of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* often is inadequate, and where I have felt the need I have provided my own translations. All major differences with the English translations will be individually noted.

³⁰Greene, *Dialectic of Freedom*, 80.

³¹*Ibid.*

choose. Freedom must be lived out within the larger frame of a vast world of cultural conditions. Her notion of freedom and education for freedom is the most comprehensive to be found in the American literature of philosophy of education since Dewey.

Throughout this history of the idea of freedom in America I will be asking what each understanding of freedom entails for education for freedom. I will be asking what are the effects of each idea of freedom upon the American dialogue concerning freedom. We must realize that beyond the shallow Lockean formulation of freedom is a wealth of ideas concerning the nature of freedom.

Unfortunately, the liberal idea of freedom has been predominant throughout American history and it has resulted in a failure to provide real education for freedom. If taken up, each of the various competing ideas of freedom could have a powerful influence on how we educate citizens in their capacity as free human beings living within a larger democratic society. I hope to show that with a radical reconceptualization of the idea of freedom we can begin to understand more fully how, as a society, we can educate Americans to be participatory citizens. As long as the Lockean notion of freedom remains preeminent, there can be little progress toward freedom. Lockean liberal freedom is innate and god-given, therefore social activity is assumed, of necessity, to place limits upon human freedom. Such is the perverse path we as a nation have followed since our origin. This Lockean freedom is, in truth, a most terrible shackle. The overthrow of the Lockean idea of freedom and the presentation of more viable alternatives are the goals of this study.

CHAPTER TWO THE LOCKEAN LIBERAL IDEA OF FREEDOM AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

Tyranny of ideas always leads to tyranny of deeds.

—Rudolf Rocker, *Pioneers of American Freedom*

A central piece of this study is the claim that the Lockean liberal idea of freedom has been and continues to be the predominant understanding of freedom in the United States. And though both John Dewey and Maxine Greene state as much, it is necessary that this claim be substantiated. Without establishing this claim, this study would become little more than a series of ideas concerning freedom. The enormous influence of John Locke's ideas on thought in this country must be established.

As with most, perhaps all, philosophers, if one were to selectively search through their works with an eye toward finding support for a particular position (and if one conveniently ignored the context of any sentence or phrase), one could piece together such phrases and sentences as one wished and claim to have found some support in the text for virtually any position. Such is the case with reading Locke. Many of Locke's contemporaries and inheritors have used his works to claim support for

widely divergent positions.¹ Some academics claim that the Lockean liberal notion of freedom does not do justice to Locke, and I agree. Other modern writers on Locke claim that his *oeuvre* is not wholly consistent in itself with regard to many ideas and, especially, with regard to the idea of freedom.²

Locke's writings on freedom must be closely examined so as to determine his authentic position on freedom. However, this is not actually required for the point I wish to make. Regardless of the claims made by some academics that Locke himself would not agree with all of the various interpretations that his works have been made to bear over the centuries, there has come down to us a set of ideas that are typically understood to be Lockean.

Certainly, the two prime sources in Locke on freedom are his *Two Treatises of Government* and his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Both were published originally in 1690.³ The two texts differ greatly in purpose and scope. The *Essay* has its roots in Locke's thought going back 20 years prior to its publication. Known drafts, manuscripts, and letters with dates from 1671 to 1685 show that Locke's *Essay* was only slowly to come to maturity.⁴ Locke's *Two Treatises*, though often thought to have been written expressly for the defense of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, was

¹Peter Laslett, introduction to *Two Treatises of Government*, by John Locke, student edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 14.

²*Ibid.*, 80.

³Though the first printed copies of *Two Treatises* bear the date of 1690, it was actually published in November, 1689. See Laslett's introduction to *Two Treatises of Government*, 12n.

⁴Peter Nidditch, introduction to *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* by John Locke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), xii-xv.

more likely begun a full 10 years prior to its publication and thus could not have been originally intended as (though in effect it obviously was) a defense of the events of 1688.⁵

The fact that Locke worked on both texts for extended amounts of time has led some scholars to expect that the *Essay* (the more philosophical of the two works) should provide the grounding for what is developed in the *Two Treatises*. This speculation is rejected by Peter Laslett of Trinity College, Cambridge. Laslett says that "Locke is, perhaps, the least consistent of all the great philosophers, and pointing out the contradictions either within any of his works or between them is no difficult task."⁶ Further, Laslett concludes that the *Essay* and the *Two Treatises* were written for vastly different purposes and employed different methods. The philosophy of the *Essay* has very little or nothing in common (in aims or methods) with the political *Two Treatises*.⁷ The *Essay* is philosophical in aim, abstractly rational in method, and psychological in context. The *Two Treatises* is political in its aim, empirical in method, and sociological in context. Laslett points to the differing aims of the two texts.⁸ And Laslett points out Locke's preference for using different intellectual methods depending on the matter with which he dealt.

Empirical medicine, rather than philosophy seems to be the model for the man who sets out to comment on political matters. Locke the

⁵Laslett, introduction to *Two Treatises*, 35 and 46-7.

⁶*Ibid.*, 82.

⁷*Ibid.*, 83.

⁸*Ibid.*

doctor rather than Locke the epistemologist is the man we should have in mind when we read his work on *Government*.⁹

Laslett concludes that it is impossible to reconcile Locke's two great works. "It is pointless to look upon his [Locke's] work as an integrated body of speculation and generalization, with a general philosophy at its centre and as its architectural framework."¹⁰ We should be aware of the existing precedent for the writing of political works which are unrelated to any overarching philosophical, religious, or moral system. According to Laslett "there did exist a counter-tradition to natural law, a convention of discussing politics and its theory outside the area of philosophy."¹¹ That counter-tradition is most familiar to us in the writings of Machiavelli. Thus, we ought not think that Locke's philosophical work grounds the political.

If we now agree that the *Two Treatises* and the *Essay* have no necessary connection with each other, we can proceed to show the great influence of these two texts. We will also see that the modern notion of Lockean liberalism is based upon the misguided attempt to make the *Essay* function as the philosophical ground of the *Two Treatises*. In order to fully demonstrate the depth and breadth of Lockean influence, we must look to, at least, three important realms: (1) political philosophy, (2) literature, and (3) Bible interpretation. By focusing narrowly upon Locke the political philosopher we lose sight of the great breadth of Locke's influence. And, typically, those academics who would minimize Locke's influence on the

⁹Laslett, introduction to *Two Treatises*, 86.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 87.

¹¹*Ibid.*

thought of the eighteenth century ignore or slight the last two realms of influence and instead focus narrowly on the first.¹²

Lockean Political Thought and the American Revolution

A great deal has been written about the role of Lockean thought in the American Revolution.¹³ Thomas Pangle of the University of Toronto says that

It is not unreasonable to contend that Locke's influence on the eighteenth century, especially in America, was massive. . . . One may rightly say that in the generations after Locke, lesser men of all stamps of opinion and sect felt increasingly the compulsion to explain their views using Lockean ideas; and this means that they were induced . . . to transmit even the most traditional opinions in drastically modified versions. By the late eighteenth century, the largely Lockean consensus on political first principles and on the relation between politics and religion was so strong that only a few articulate Americans still sensed a need to thrash out the deep doubts imbedded in the lingering legacies of biblical and classical thought.¹⁴

¹²See for example William Walker, *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹³For a particularly good, short study of the historiography of the relationship between the American Revolution and Locke, see Steven Dworetz, "'See Locke on Government': The *Two Treatises* and the American Revolution" in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 21, ed. Patricia Craddock and Carla Hay (East Lansing, Michigan: Colleagues Press, 1991), 101-127.

¹⁴Thomas Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of The American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 126.

Some scholars have argued that Locke's influence on the American Revolution has been overstated.¹⁵ However, most of these studies are very specialized and scholarly examinations of Locke's work showing that when Locke is read in the finest of detail many of the liberal ideas of politics commonly attributed to him are, perhaps, not truly Locke's own.¹⁶ Laslett virtually admits this when he explains that Locke's writings were used in the defense of *both* sides of the American Revolution.¹⁷

It is certainly true that no single idea of Locke's inspired the American founding fathers to revolution and that Locke's later popularizers did not always reproduce Locke's ideas with full fidelity. Certainly Locke's *Two Treatises* is not and should not be read as a call to revolution. Something much more subtle was going on. What Locke provided to those thoughtful men who led the American revolution was not a formula for rebellion, but, rather, a set of subtle ideas that allowed the leaders of the American Revolution to justify their actions on biblical grounds as well as a set of categories that made revolution thinkable. To be more precise, what Locke provided was a theology that grounded a theory of human nature which held the view that each individual is naturally free and retains sovereignty, and thus people have the right to dissolve government. This "liberalism" of Lockean inspiration, but never fully constructed by Locke himself, came to dominate American thinking with regard to both

¹⁵See Peter Laslett's introduction to *Two Treatises of Government*, by John Locke, 14; and John Dunn, "The Politics of Locke in England and America in the Eighteenth Century" in W. Yolton, ed. *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

¹⁶See Walker, *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy*.

¹⁷Laslett, introduction to *Two Treatises*, 14.

government and business up to the present day. Thus, for my purposes, what I will regard as "Lockean liberalism" consists in a peculiar psychology (or theory of human nature) which in turn legitimates both the theories of minimalist government and laissez-faire capitalism. This peculiar psychology is one of radical individuation in which each person is viewed as by nature "free, equal, and rational." As such, each person retains sovereignty over him/herself.¹⁸

This idea of individual sovereignty is important. For Locke, all legitimate government has authority by grant of the people it is to govern. Further, those persons who constitute the government retain the right to dissolve that government should it become abusive of the legitimate ends of government. Thus actual sovereignty is retained always in the individual and can never be surrendered.¹⁹

We have already been introduced to Mehta's explanation of Lockean liberalism. Mehta concludes that Lockean liberalism consists in a view (or psychology) of human beings in which each is naturally free, rational, and equal. Each person also is claimed to have an interest in the preservation of their own life, liberty, and property. As Mehta explains it, the liberal state is voluntarily instituted in order to avoid a state of war that would occur should human kind's natural needs be allowed to proceed without regulation. This liberal state has legitimate power only in so far as people

¹⁸See Uday Singh Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in Locke's Political Thought* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 15 and Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, bk II, § 4-7, 11.

¹⁹See Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. II, chap. viii ("Of the Beginning of Political Societies") and chap. ix ("The Ends of Political Society and Government").

give it power and in so far as this power is used for the preservation of life, liberty, and property.²⁰

Notice that this understanding of liberalism engenders the conception of liberal institutions and laws as restraints on freedom. The natural freedom of each person in the state of nature is abandoned only with hesitation for a commonwealth in which greater security may be guaranteed. What is lost in the exchange is some degree of freedom. This conception of freedom makes perfectly understandable (though still misguided) the writings of those thinkers who would claim that we cannot become too free without slipping into the dangerous realm of anarchy and thus claim the necessity to limit human freedom in order to attain some degree of sociality.²¹

This Lockean liberal concept of freedom is a radical break from the medieval thought that humankind was not free but, rather, had a particular nature to fulfill; Lockean liberalism breaks with a teleological conception of humankind. By presenting a new understanding of human nature as radically open (the *tabula rasa*) Locke helped to throw off more than 2,000

²⁰Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom*, 81.

²¹For example see, Ernest Bayles. *Democratic Educational Theory* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), especially 149. See also Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. and introduction by G. D. H. Cole (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1950), 3-4: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they. How did this change come about? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? That question I think I can answer." Rousseau's "answer" as to how these chains may be made "legitimate" is the social contract. Again, we are understood to surrender some degree of freedom in return for security.

years of a theory of human nature that claimed some specific content to human nature.²²

By 1776 there is no doubt but that Locke's work was well known to the leaders of the infant United States. Benjamin Franklin, writing in his *Autobiography*, says that it was about his sixteenth year (1722) that he read Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.²³ But if one were made to choose a single spokesman for the essential principles upon which this nation was founded, few could object to the choice of Thomas Jefferson. As the author of the Declaration of Independence, tireless proponent for the inclusion of a "Bill of Rights" within the Constitution, vice-President under John Adams, third President, author of the state of Virginia's "Act for Establishing Religious Freedom," and as a man of true genius and great learning, no man could hold a greater claim to being the voice and mind of early America.

Jefferson was a great admirer of Locke and was doubtlessly much influenced by him. In a letter to a young friend interested in furthering his education, Jefferson recommends that "Locke's little book on Government, is perfect as far as it goes."²⁴ This reference to Locke's "little book on Government" may seem strange when one realizes that Locke's *Two*

²²For a modern continuation of this un-Lockean, teleological notion see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1981).

²³Benjamin Franklin, *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Carl Van Doren (New York: Viking Press, 1945), 226.

²⁴Thomas Jefferson, letter to Thomas Mann Randolph, dated New York, May 30, 1790 in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Random House, 1993), 456.

Treatises in modern form is about 300 pages, not a little book. However, as Laslett points out, the early editions in America did not include the *First Treatise* and left out the first chapter of the *Second Treatise*.²⁵ Though full editions were printed in England, from Jefferson's reference to Locke's "little book" one would suppose that Jefferson had read an American edition and was familiar with only the second half of the book, at least as of the date of the letter, 1790. This would mean that the *First Treatise* (Locke's interpretation of the Bible, which for him grounded his theory of government) may have been unknown to Jefferson at this time. Of course, Jefferson's Christianity was such that he needed no help from Locke in breaking away from orthodox interpretations.

Something of the high regard that Jefferson held for Locke is conveyed in another letter. Writing to Dr. Benjamin Rush, Jefferson relates a conversation between himself and Alexander Hamilton while in a meeting with other government dignitaries. Jefferson relates that the room had a collection of the portraits "of remarkable men, among them were those of Bacon, Newton, and Locke. Hamilton asked me who they were. I told him they were my trinity of the three greatest men the world had ever produced" ²⁶

Perhaps the strongest single piece of evidence for the depth of Locke's influence over Jefferson is the Declaration of Independence itself. Jefferson is the author of this document, but Locke clearly inspired it. The purpose of the Declaration was less one of mere declaration and more one of

²⁵Laslett, introduction to *Two Treatises*, 14.

²⁶Jefferson, letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush, dated Monticello, January 16, 1811 in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 558.

explanation. The colonial Americans felt strongly that their natural affiliation to England could not be undone for trivial reasons; they felt the necessity to explain in considerable detail the reasons that justified ending their English bondage. In the *Second Treatise*, Locke responds to an imaginary interlocutor who asserts that revolution will be too lightly undertaken when people have the right to dissolve government. Locke responds that the people will not dissolve government lightly; rather they willingly suffer the numerous slights and petty abuses naturally performed by government and will only seek to dissolve government upon overwhelming abuse of authority. Locke says,

*Revolutions happen not upon every little mismanagement in publick affairs. Great mistakes in the ruling part, many wrong and inconvenient Laws, and all the slips of humane frailty will be born by the People, without mutiny or mummur. But if a long train of Abuses, Prevarications, and Artifices, all tending the same way, make the design visible to the People, and they cannot but feel, what they lie under, and see, whither they are going; 'tis not to be wonder'd, they should then rouse themselves, and endeavour to put the rule into such hands, which may secure to them the ends for which government was first erected . . .*²⁷

We should readily notice the similarity in the actual words and meaning of the Declaration.

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is

²⁷Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. II, §225.

their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.²⁸

Jefferson and the Continental Congress then go on to detail the “long train of abuses,” that include: cutting off trade with the rest of the world, depriving Americans of trial by jury, refusal to pass necessary laws, refusal to punish English officials for wrong-doing, waging war on Americans, and numerous other charges.

Thus we should see that Jefferson and the Continental Congress not only borrowed language directly from Locke (the “long train of abuses”), but, more importantly, accepted the criterion Locke established as necessary for the dissolution of government. No “little mismanagement” or “slips of humane frailty” could suffice for so weighty a task as the dissolution of government; only a “long train of abuses” could justify such a serious undertaking.

But this only shows that Jefferson was familiar with Locke’s thought and generally agreed with him. Did Jefferson hold an essentially Lockean liberal notion of freedom? That is the central question. Recall that the foundation of Lockean liberalism is an atomistic human psychology, founded either upon theology or a view of the social sciences. Locke claimed that each individual is free, equal, and rational, and it is as free individuals that we choose to come together to form a government; the government and society itself have only so much legitimate authority as people willingly give them, and people cannot give unlimited power over themselves to any society or government—such would be slavery.

²⁸Thomas Jefferson, “The Declaration of Independence” in *An American Primer*, ed. Daniel Boorstin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966; reprint, New York: Meridian, 1995), 86-7.

Jefferson, at least, clearly entertained this atomistic view of human nature. In a letter written to his good friend, James Monroe, a man who himself would later be President, Jefferson counsels on the proper relationship of the private and the public.

If we are made in some degree for others, yet, in a greater degree, are we made for ourselves. It were contrary to feeling, and indeed ridiculous to suppose that a man has less rights in himself than one of his neighbors, or indeed all of them put together. This would be slavery, and not that liberty which the bill of rights has made inviolable, and for the preservation of which our government has been charged.²⁹

Additionally we could look again to the Declaration of Independence to see that government has as its only source of legitimation the voluntary yielding over of authority to it on the part of sovereign individuals. "That to secure these [inalienable] rights, governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . ."³⁰ For Jefferson all liberty and sovereignty rests ultimately in the individual; government and other associations exist to secure this natural and individual status and can do nothing to increase it. Jefferson would seem to have agreed with Leonardo da Vinci, who is reputed to have remarked that while alone he owned the whole world, in the presence of a friend he could claim only half.

²⁹Jefferson, letter to Colonel James Monroe, dated Monticello, May 20, 1782, in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 339.

³⁰Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence" in Boorstin, ed., *An American Primer*, 86.

There are scholars who claim that Jefferson was more a proponent of a social view of human nature than I have given him credit for.³¹ Still, I think that even Jefferson had succumbed, in large part, to the basic tenets of Lockean liberalism. If we look back to Jefferson's original version of the Declaration of Independence, which the Continental Congress saw fit to alter into a more acceptable version, we find that Jefferson himself says "We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights. . . ." ³² The Congress removed the word "inherent." Later in the Declaration there is mention that the people, when suitably abused, have the right to "alter" their government; this implies that some form of government must remain and that the people lack the right to do away with government altogether. In Jefferson's original draft, which the Congress changed, the Declaration states that the people have the right to "expunge their former systems of government."³³

While holding the position of Secretary of State in the year 1793, Jefferson had occasion to consider the legal and moral obligations that exist between nations. Jefferson says that "The moral duties which exist between individual and individual in a state of nature, accompany them into a state of society. . . ." ³⁴ Here we find Lockean ideas in their most overt form. Further, we find plentiful evidence that, deep down, Jefferson did not trust

³¹See Sidney Hook, *The Paradoxes of Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 7.

³²Jefferson, *Autobiography* in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 24.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Jefferson, *The Life and Selected Writings*, 295.

government and required that it remain of minimal stature. In a letter of 1816, Jefferson advises Joseph Cabell (who worked closely with Jefferson on establishing the University of Virginia) that good government is small government in which every man participates.

What has destroyed liberty and the rights of man in every government which has ever existed under the sun? The generalizing and concentrating all cares and powers into one body. . . . And I do believe that if the Almighty has not decreed that man shall never be free, (and it is a blasphemy to believe it,) that the secret will be found to be in the making himself the depository of the powers respecting himself, so far as he is competent to them, and delegating only what is beyond his competence by a synthetical process, to higher and higher orders of functionaries, so as to trust fewer and fewer powers in proportion as the trustees become more and more oligarchical. . . . Where every man is a sharer in the direction of his ward-republic, or of some of the higher ones, and feels that he is a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day; when there shall not be a man in the State who will not be a member of some one of its councils, great or small, he will let the heart be torn out of his body sooner than his power be wrested from him by a Cæsar or a Bonaparte.³⁵

What of other colonial American thinkers? Alexander Hamilton may well have been something of a conservative counterpart to Jefferson. And though Hamilton was not well liked by Jefferson, who called him an enemy of the republic,³⁶ he had a powerful intellect and gained substantial power. Hamilton is usually considered to have been more influenced by Hobbes than by Locke. But, of course, Locke was much influenced by Hobbes. So we should not see Locke and Hobbes as antithetical to one another. Perhaps most important of all, both Locke and Hobbes shared a

³⁵Jefferson, *The Life and Selected Writings*, 604.

³⁶Jefferson, letter to President Washington, dated Monticello, September 9, 1782, in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 475.

common view on human nature, and this view of human nature became the core of the Lockean liberal tradition.

Whereas Hobbes saw the state of nature as identical to the state of war, Locke sharply distinguished the two and felt only that a state of war was the most likely, but not the inevitable, development of the state of nature. The reason for this shared view is their common understanding of human nature. In line with Christian tradition, both men could see human beings as essentially corrupt. Whether due to the biblical Fall from the garden of Eden or through some more obscure path, humanity was corrupt and in need of some system of salvation, be it divine or political. Hamilton, in line with his Hobbesian lineage, felt the depravity of humanity strongly. Jefferson, in line with his Lockean heritage, also felt this depravity but was open to the probability that some genuine goodness also resided in the human heart.

Regardless of degrees, both Hamilton and Jefferson thought of human nature as essentially selfish. They derived, in some part, these views from Hobbes and Locke, respectively. Hobbes and Locke

found the most fundamental law of nature in the desire for mere self-preservation. From this they deduced the right of every man to pursue a course most conducive to the preservation of his own life. The proclamation of the desire for self-preservation as the basis of all reasoning on things social and political was responsible for the development of one of the most striking tenets of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political philosophy: the doctrine of radical selfishness of man. This doctrine was of paramount significance for the thought of Alexander Hamilton.

This radical selfishness was the source of Hobbes's and Locke's fundamental distinction between the state of nature and the state of society; it explained the necessity of the social contract.³⁷

Both Hamilton and Jefferson shared this pessimistic psychology of selfishness. And though Jefferson hoped that a society could be built that would limit these selfish propensities, Hamilton saw them as the basis for morality itself. Writing later in life, Jefferson said "Self-love, therefore, is no part of morality. Indeed it is exactly its counterpart. It is the sole antagonist of virtue, leading us constantly by our propensities to self-gratification in violation of our moral duties to others."³⁸ Hamilton, and his conservative cohorts, saw the possibility of making selfishness virtue itself. In a statement that could just as easily come from a modern behaviorist psychologist, Hamilton spoke of the "principles of human nature, that are as infallible as any mathematical calculations."³⁹ And Hamilton's view of human nature was that we are all ruled by selfish interest. The trick of good government was to turn these private vices into public virtues. Hamilton goes so far as to state outright this view: "Our prevailing passions are ambition and interest; and it will ever be the duty of a wise government to avail itself of those passions, in order to make them subservient to the public good. . . ."⁴⁰ It should be nothing to wonder about

³⁷Gerald Stourzh, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1970), 18.

³⁸Jefferson, letter to Thomas Law, Esq., dated Poplar Forest, June 13, 1814, in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 583.

³⁹Stourzh, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government*, 76.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 79.

that Locke and the Constitution include as one of humankind's fundamental rights as that to property. This right to property is strongly upheld by Hamilton. We may even choose to speculate, in not any extreme fashion, that the American Revolution and the Constitution are in large part the expression of the bourgeois interests that had, in historical terms only during the eighteenth century, come into contention for political power with older feudal interests. The reigning interests of this bourgeois class were selfish, and in order to broaden their appeal they had to be, and were, universalized.⁴¹

Locke and Literature

This study of the Lockean influence could not be complete without a look at literature. Those who think of Locke principally in political or philosophical terms may be surprised at the extent to which Lockean themes were taken up in popular literature. Lockean liberal themes abound in the literature from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. We should remember that the tradition of political content in aesthetic guise is at least as old as Sophocles' *Antigone*. In fact, the failure of any political theory to find substantial embodiment in popular literature should be adequate evidence of the limited and unpopular nature of that political thought.

In his now classic study, *John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, Kenneth MacLean says quite simply that "The book

⁴¹See particularly, Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), and Charles Beard, *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

that had most influence in the Eighteenth Century, the Bible excepted, was Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)."⁴² Locke's *Essay* was reprinted nine times in England between 1727 and 1760; in addition, during this same period four editions of Locke's complete works were published in England.⁴³ Other editions appeared numerous throughout Europe around this time. When Voltaire traveled to England and read Locke he was so impressed that he remarked that "Locke is the Hercules of metaphysics who posed the limits of the human mind."⁴⁴

Of course, Locke's ideas were opposed. In the first half of the eighteenth century, church officials (both Catholic and Protestant) throughout Europe fought against the notion that there were no God-given, innate ideas. Some men of literature also opposed the Lockean advance. Locke's teaching concerning the absence of innate ideas was ridiculed in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Voltaire, despite his admiration for Locke, also made fun of Locke's claim that there were no innate ideas in *Candide*.⁴⁵ MacLean demonstrates that virtually all British and French thinkers of the eighteenth century read Locke's *Essay*. Many took up Lockean notions, and even those opponents of Locke who ridiculed his ideas brought them before the public all the same.

⁴²Kenneth MacLean, *John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1936), v.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁴⁴Voltaire, *Œuvres Complètes*, XLVI, 79-80 in MacLean, *John Locke and English Literature*, 3 n. [My translation.]

⁴⁵MacLean, *John Locke and English Literature*, 26-8.

We must address Daniel Defoe's masterpiece, *Robinson Crusoe*, as it was not only tremendously popular throughout the eighteenth century, but, also because it is the quintessential eighteenth century novel of Lockean liberalism. *Crusoe* was first published in 1719, just less than thirty years after the first publication of Locke's *Essay* and *Two Treatises*. The original publisher, William Taylor, had a reputation for publishing works of quality, not light reading. And though the first edition sold for five shillings, substantially more expensive than the average book of its time, Taylor reprinted *Crusoe* three additional times in its first year alone. Such was the demand for copies that pirated versions quickly sprang up, some by reputable publishers who well rendered Defoe's text and by others of lower quality who sharply abridged and sometimes mangled the work.⁴⁶

The first substantial episode in *Robinson Crusoe* is the young man's willful disobedience to his father. Robinson puts to sea despite the warnings of his father. This act of disobedience is substantial. Ian Bell in his article "King Crusoe: Locke's Political Theory in *Robinson Crusoe*" says that

The political significance of this position is enormous. Having illustrated the possibilities of successfully cutting loose from the patriarch in domestic life, Defoe had created an image with revolutionary potential. Radicals of the later eighteenth century did not fail to notice the book's power.⁴⁷

After his act of filial disobedience, *Crusoe* finds himself in a number of preliminary adventures. The core of the novel begins with *Crusoe's*

⁴⁶Angus Ross, introduction to *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe (London: Penguin, 1965), 10 and 12.

⁴⁷Ian Bell. "King Crusoe: Locke's Political Theory in *Robinson Crusoe*," *English Studies* 1 (1988): 30.

being shipwrecked alone on an island off the coast of Columbia. Alone and struggling in the waves of a sea whipped to enormous heights, Crusoe is stripped of his clothes. Naked and exhausted he is thrust out of the sea onto a beach as a new born babe is thrust out of its safety and into an alien world. "I was wet, had no clothes to shift me, nor any thing either to eat or drink to comfort me. . . ."48 And though, without a doubt, much of the attraction of the story consists in the wonderful adventures, the primary Lockean element consists in Crusoe's progressive building of a community around him. After being alone for years, Crusoe comes into contact with various other persons. In *every* case in which Crusoe comes into contact with other human beings on his "island of despair," the Lockean model of society building is fully played out.

First we must see that Crusoe lives in a Lockean "state of nature." Locke says that living "without a common Superior on Earth, with Authority to judge between them, is *properly a State of Nature*."⁴⁹ The first person to join with Crusoe is Friday, the cannibal who Crusoe reforms. Though Crusoe and Friday share no spoken language, Friday's willing and absolute submission to Crusoe is made clear when Friday, bowing to the ground, places his own head beneath Crusoe's foot. But the reason for the alliance between the two men is clearly Lockean. People join into society because of the want of security. As Locke says,

To avoid this State of War (wherein there is no appeal but to Heaven, and wherein every the least difference is apt to end, where there is no Authority to decide between the Contenders) is one *great reason of*

⁴⁸Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin, 1965), 66.

⁴⁹Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. II, §19.

*Mens putting themselves into Society, and quitting the State of Nature.*⁵⁰

Crusoe in a state of nature vis-a-vis the cannibals and any pirates who come along and Friday (a captive of a rival group of cannibals and ready to become their repast) are obviously both in a state of heightened insecurity. By joining together they increase the level of security for both men. Within Lockean theory it is obvious that the only possible relationship between Crusoe, the rational Englishman, and Friday, the naked cannibal lacking reason, must be one of master and slave. "I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life; . . . I likewise taught him to say Master, and then let him know, that was to be my name. . . ."⁵¹ Locke, we should recall, bases freedom on reason alone. Those not having developed reason, must be under the authority of those who do.⁵² Thus Friday and Crusoe form a sort of society in which Friday can only play the role of slave.

Later when Crusoe has the opportunity to negotiate in plain English with fully rational men, the negotiations for the formation of a community out of a state of nature is, again, clearly Lockean. Upon rescuing a Spaniard from the hands of the cannibals, Crusoe learns that a small group of Spaniards on the mainland live in fear of the cannibals. The Spaniard and Crusoe discuss the possibility of helping this group, but Crusoe is concerned that upon helping the Spaniards they may turn against him. In return for Crusoe's promise of help, Crusoe insists that the Spaniard swear that he not

⁵⁰Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. II, § 21.

⁵¹Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 209.

⁵²Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. II, § 55.

"stir from me as long as he lived, 'till I gave his orders; and that he would take my side to the last drop of his blood, if there should happen the least breach of faith among his country-men."⁵³ Again, both men fearing their mutual lack of security in the state of nature make a contract or compact in order to form between them a state of political society. In this case, as in all cases in *Robinson Crusoe*, authority is given up to Crusoe himself. Locke makes explicit that the state of society or commonwealth comes into being only "by setting up a Judge on Earth, with Authority to determine all the Controversies, and redress the Injuries, that may happen to any Member of the Commonwealth. . . ."⁵⁴ Clearly, Crusoe is that judge. But we also must notice that both men have yielded over some of their freedom. Though they are now more secure, they are less free, being bound to one another. This is the fundamental Lockean liberal contention: that in entering into political society with one another we are thereby less free but more secure.

The third example of compact has the same Lockean ingredients. This time a sea captain whose men have mutinied is brought ashore. The captain and two loyal men are bound under a tree while the mutineers await the high tide to float their boat. Crusoe having sneaked up close to the captain unseen by the malefactors asks, "If I venture upon your deliverance, are you willing to make two conditions with me?" The captain in his obvious insecurity agrees to give over authority to Crusoe and, if they prevail, carry him back to England on the regained ship.⁵⁵ The captain

⁵³Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 244.

⁵⁴Locke, *Two Treatises*. bk. II, § 89.

⁵⁵Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 253-4.

yields over to Crusoe certain of his natural freedom in exchange for greater security.

Ian Bell's article "King Crusoe" explains this relationship between Lockean doctrine and the adventurous life of Crusoe. Bell says,

Defoe is sporting with notions of contract and enjoying the freedom to literalise Locke's abstract speculations about pre-political society. Defoe seems to be dramatizing the process of formation of political society, demystifying it without debunking it, and thereby naturalizing Locke's ideology.⁵⁶

The language Crusoe uses should further convince that, for all intents and purposes, *Robinson Crusoe* is a fictional representation of Lockean political philosophy. When referring to the dangers posed by the cannibals, Crusoe worries about the possibility of entering into a "state of war" with them.⁵⁷ Directly after his shipwreck, while considering his condition, Crusoe says that he was "reduced to a meer state of nature,"⁵⁸ these are Locke's own terms.

There can be no doubt that already in the early part of the eighteenth century Lockean ideas were taken up in literary form, including his understanding of freedom and its relationship to political society. But we may be surprised at the great number of fictional works that presented Locke's ideas to an audience that may never have heard of him had they been left to read only the *Essay* or the *Two Treatises*.

Another popular book presented Locke's ideas to the novel reading public. *Tristram Shandy*, a bawdy novel by Laurence Sterne, first appeared

⁵⁶Ian Bell, "King Crusoe," 32.

⁵⁷Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 233.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 130.

in 1760. It was immediately popular, and sequels continued to appear for another seven years—that is until the year before Sterne’s death in 1768. A major modern historian calls the book a “virtuoso exploitation of Lockian psychology.”⁵⁹ Sterne uses his characters and their entertaining, yet unsavory, actions to lay out an understanding of Locke’s theory of knowledge as association. That Sterne should use such painful encounters as Tristram’s accidental castration in the window sash to explain Lockean psychology could only add to the book’s popular appeal.

Though any reader of *Tristram* would be hard pressed to find themes of freedom or Lockean social contract theory, we must remember that these theories are built upon a psychological foundation of radical autonomy. This psychology is omni-present in *Tristram*.⁶⁰ The centrality of Lockean psychology in text can hardly be over-stated. Sterne, a man educated at Cambridge, saw Locke’s revolt against innate ideas as liberating. But he also realized that the Lockean psychology of sense perception separated us from our world.⁶¹

Henry Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality*, which appeared only six years after *Tristram*, is another book full of Lockean notions. Here we find not epistemology but education. As Professor Butt says, though we ought not

⁵⁹John Butt, *The Mid-Eighteenth Century*, ed. and compiled by Geoffrey Carnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 432.

⁶⁰For a more complete examination of Locke’s influence on *Tristram Shandy* see Ernest Tuveson, “Locke and Sterne” in *Reason and Imagination: Studies in the History of Ideas, 1600-1800*, ed. J. A. Mazzeo (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 255-277.

⁶¹Peter Briggs, “Locke’s *Essay* and the Strategies of Eighteenth-Century English Satire” in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 10, ed. Harry Payne (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 143-4.

call *The Fool of Quality* an exposition of Locke's view of education "it is clear that he [Brooke] had read Locke's *Thoughts* on the subject. . . ."62 Some of the many eighteenth century works that can be claimed to have substantial Lockean influence include Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son*, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, and the now virtually unknown but once very popular *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson.⁶³

The Scriblerus Club, founded by John Arbuthnot, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, is well-known among scholars of British literature for their "elaborate parodies of the fine points of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*,"⁶⁴ Locke's text of psychology. Joseph Addison was famous for his popularization of Lockean ideas.⁶⁵

The list of titles that have some claim to Lockean influence is impressive. Even the idea of using of pictures in children's books was stamped by Lockean theory. In his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* Locke recommends that young readers be given an illustrated copy of Aesop's fables.

If his *Aesop* has Pictures in it, it will entertain him much better, and encourage him to read. . . . For such visible Objects Children hear talked of in vain, and without any satisfaction, whilst they have no

⁶²Butt, *The Mid-Eighteenth Century*, 470-1.

⁶³MacLean. *John Locke and English Literature*.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁵See Geoffrey Summerfield, *Fantasy and Reason: Children's Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1984).

Ideas of them; those Ideas being not to be had from Sounds; but from the Things themselves, or their Pictures.⁶⁶

This idea of using pictures in children's books is directly entailed from Locke's epistemological views as set forth in his *Essay*. In the beginning of book II of the *Essay*, Locke questions that since the mind is like a "white Paper, void of all Characters, without any Ideas; How comes it to be furnished? . . . To this I answer, in one word, From *Experience*. . ."⁶⁷ Pictures give this "experience." Though certainly influenced by Comenius, Locke did much to popularize the use of pictures in books for children in England and America.⁶⁸

Locke also is credited with the boom of children's literature in the early eighteenth century. The English journal *Guardian of Education* stated in 1802 that there were very few books written for children before the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714). "The first period of Infantine and Juvenile Literature' began, the journal declared, after Mr. Locke popularized 'the idea of uniting amusement with instruction.'"⁶⁹

⁶⁶John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, §156 in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. and introduction by James Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 259.

⁶⁷Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk. II, chap. 1, § 1.

⁶⁸Locke was well aware of Comenius' *Janua Linguarum* (1631), which instructed children in Latin through the use of pictures. The *Janua* itself was quite popular in England during Locke's time; there were seventeen English editions of the *Janua* published between 1640 and 1700. Locke, *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, James Axtell, ed., 260n.

⁶⁹Samuel Pickering, Jr., *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth-Century England* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 7.

Pickering's *John Locke and Children's Books of the Eighteenth-Century* demonstrates the vast influence of Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Pickering details dozens of extremely popular children's books that were conceived along the lines set out by Locke in *Some Thoughts*. But one stands out as particularly interesting for this study. John Newberry was an influential and talented publisher of eighteenth century children's books in London. (To this day the "Newberry Award" is one of the most prestigious prizes available for writers of children's books.) "Blending batches of good fun, sprinklings of instruction, and a dollop of Locke's educational ideas into his books, Newberry became the first publisher of children's books on a large scale in Britain."⁷⁰ A representative book of his is *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes; Otherwise called, Mrs. Margery Two-Shoes* (first published in 1765). This story espouses not only Locke's view on education but also the central teaching of Locke's psychology, i.e., the absence of innate ideas. Though Goody Two-Shoes (the heroine of the story) is repeatedly dealt the harshest serving of life, including the early death of her parents, she overcomes all problems. Locke taught that education, not birth, made the difference in one's station in life; the *tabula rasa* is there waiting to be filled with good things all brought about by hard work and a good heart. "Education had made the difference between poverty and wealth for Goody Two-Shoes."⁷¹ Only with the advent of a psychology that taught that each person was infinitely malleable and not predestined to any particular station could this kind of rags-to-riches story be considered educational. We see in Goody

⁷⁰Pickering, *John Locke and Children's Books*, 13.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 50.

Two-Shoes the predecessor for all of the Horatio Alger stories to become so popular in the nineteenth century. We must recognize that children were being taught that the world was open and their futures were theirs to make; and, of course, these stories taught that every failure was the responsibility of the person who failed. We ought not be surprised that such literature for children would be so popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, since they were a time of both the rapid growth of the bourgeois class and an accompanying strength in the Protestant work ethic.⁷²

We should note also that the birth of the novel was contemporaneous with the opening of the eighteenth century. The hallmarks of the novel that distinguish it from older forms of literature, like the romance, include an interest in the real rather than the fantastic as well as a focus on the psychological. The novel turns away from the fantastic heroes and kings of the romance and tells, instead, the stories of realistic people (middle-class people). The novel is also a more "internal" form of literature, taking an interest in the processes of the human mind. We should not be surprised that the birth of the novel is contemporaneous with the growing interest in a novel-reading class: the bourgeoisie. It was their interests that were taken up in the novel, their hopes and fears that were examined. *Crusoe* is only one example of this bourgeois concern with the establishment of a political society in which the businessman could thrive. We should recall that *Crusoe* also is a story of financial success through hard work.

⁷²See Isaac Kramnick, "Children's Literature and Bourgeois Ideology: Observations on Culture and Industrial Capitalism in the Later Eighteenth-Century" in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 12, ed. Harry Payne (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983): 11-44.

Locke and Theology

Though it is clearly the case that “the political thought of the Founders [of the United States] was secular, not religious,”⁷³ we may also contend that the political thought of the common yeoman farmer and shopkeeper in colonial America was religious and not secular. Religious belief plays an enormous role in the justification of the American Revolution, and here again we find that Locke’s influence was great. Locke became for many thoughtful Christians the paradigm of how to interpret the Bible. Locke’s *Two Treatises* is quite often now only half read. The *First Treatise* is an in-depth critique of Sir Robert Filmer’s interpretation of the Bible and is often ignored by modern political scholars. Filmer’s text, *Patriarcha*, was first published in 1680 and is a reasoned defense of the absolute right of kings to the subjugation of their people; Filmer’s argument is wholly based in his interpretation of the Bible. And it is Filmer’s interpretation of the Bible as embodied in the *Patriarcha* that was the target of Locke’s *First Treatise*.⁷⁴

Locke is no longer commonly recognized as a great innovator in Bible interpretation. His work on the meaning of the Bible was completely overshadowed by the German school of Higher Criticism that developed in the nineteenth century. However, it was Locke’s radical departure from traditional methods of interpretation that won him great praise from eighteenth century Bible scholars and liberal preachers, especially in the

⁷³Stourzh, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government*, 2-3.

⁷⁴Laslett, introduction to Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 60.

American colonies. We must realize that with millions of mainstream, non-philosophical, and even illiterate, Americans in churches every week being exposed by their pastors to distinctively Lockean Bible interpretations, Locke gained an avenue of ingress to the minds of Americans that was, perhaps, unparalleled by any other philosopher of the Enlightenment.

An article by Herbert Foster provides great detail concerning Locke's influence upon the American Revolution through theology. According to Foster, "The 'new method of Scripture Commentary, by Paraphrase and Notes', of 'the Great Mr. Locke' made his 'reputation as a Scripture Commentator exceeding high with the public', wrote President Stiles of Yale, 1775."⁷⁵ Ezra Stiles was himself a theologian of major reputation at the time. Other researchers have demonstrated as well the high regard Locke held as a Bible interpreter which prevailed in America in the eighteenth century. Alice Baldwin's book, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution*, is a study of the sermons and writings of New England clergymen. Baldwin concludes that Locke's influence on the message of the preachers of New England was overwhelming. In fact these preachers "were helping to spread the theories of the philosophers and to give them religious sanctions."⁷⁶ The "philosophers" to whom Baldwin refers are John Locke and Algernon Sidney. Sidney was an English republican politician and theorist and contemporary of Locke. Claude Newlin's book, *Philosophy and Religion in Colonial America*, shows again

⁷⁵Herbert Foster, "International Calvinism Through Locke and the Revolution of 1688," *American Historical Review* 32, n. 3 (April 1927), 475.

⁷⁶Alice Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution*. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 1928), 168, 170; quoted in Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, 22.

the extent of Locke's influence. An important proponent of Lockean Bible interpretation was the Anglican theologian Samuel Johnson who gained a teaching post at Yale in 1716.

During the so-called "Great Awakening" of 1740-1745, a more traditional sense of Bible interpretation was in contention with the Lockean view. But this awakening was, relatively, brief. "After 1745, the liberals emerged more and more triumphant, led by Lockean theologians such as Charles Chauncy. . . ."⁷⁷

So what was the method of Locke's Bible interpretation? Locke both rejected any literal reading of the Bible as well as the orthodox hermeneutics of his time.⁷⁸ Pangle makes clear that

Locke insists that the Bible must be read in such a way as to make it conform to reason, but reason as he conceives it is not the reason endorsed by Hooker and Thomas [Aquinas], the reason which remains a 'handmaid' to revelation. For Locke, reason is man's 'only Star and compass' amidst the 'extravagant project' and 'Folly' promoted by 'sacred custom' and 'religions.'⁷⁹

The Lockean method of Bible interpretation insisted that reason be central to understanding. Locke goes so far as to state that reason is "the Voice of God" in men.⁸⁰ Locke published, anonymously, two texts expounding on the need to bring scientific reason to the understanding of Christianity: *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), and *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1697).

⁷⁷Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, 23.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 134.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 134-5. Interior quotation is from Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. I, § 58.

⁸⁰Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. I, § 86.

However, we must take note that the great popularity of Locke as a Bible interpreter was due in large part to the influence of previous Bible scholars who had already espoused radical views in America several decades before Locke was known. That is, we must take into account the theologians of the seventeenth century who made easy the way for Locke. Vernon Parrington's exhaustive study, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*, details the work of the colonial theologians and preachers who prepared their flocks to accept Locke. Parrington calls the founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams, a "political philosopher" and "forerunner of Locke."⁸¹ One of Williams' central concerns was the establishment of a "new basis for social reorganization."⁸² Among the innovations put forth by Williams was the idea that society be founded by "compact" rather than upon some theory of divine right.⁸³

Thomas Hooker, not to be confused with the Richard Hooker who Locke quotes freely in his *Two Treatises*, was for twelve years the leader of the congregation at Hartford, Connecticut, apparently during the 1620s and 1630s. Hooker organized his church as a popular democracy and carried on contentious relations with surrounding communities that would have preferred a more "theocratic" form of government. The confrontations between John Winthrop, who held a theocratic rule over the Massachusetts Bay colony, and the radical democrat Hooker have happily come down to

⁸¹Vernon Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958/1927), 66.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*, 67.

us. Parrington provides enough excerpted material from the two men to show the depth of Hooker's commitment to radical democratic ideals. In refuting Winthrop's claim that the judgment of a magistrate is the "judgement of the Lord's," Hooker says that such a belief leads to tyranny and that he would not bear for himself or his family to live in such a state.⁸⁴

Parrington adds numerous other American writers and preachers who throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were producing democratic ideas. John Eliot of New England published his *The Christian Commonwealth* in 1659. This text argued that the word of God alone had authority, not men.⁸⁵ John Wise held forth the Congregationalist position of voluntary association against less democratic forces in his *Churches Quarrel Espoused*, 1710, and *Vindication of the Government of the New England Churches*, 1717.⁸⁶ By the 1740s some American churches had begun to espouse a form of Christian Rationalism that battered the old dogmatism of traditional belief. According to Parrington, the New England churchgoers found their own experience at odds with church dogma. While conservative preachers ranted on about the natural depravity of humankind, the New Englanders looked about themselves and found, rather than a collection of brutes, a community of hard-working and honest folks. It was only natural to begin to reason that certain church teachings did not square with their own experience. They chose to believe themselves

⁸⁴Parrington, *Main Currents*, 58.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 81-4.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 120.

rather than conservative church dogma. This trend toward increasing religious "rationalism" culminated in the Unitarian movement.⁸⁷

The claim that colonial America was already planted with the seeds of liberalism long before Locke wrote either the *Essay* or his *Two Treatises* is supported by the research of Herbert Foster. In his article, "International Calvinism Through Locke and the Revolution of 1688," we find that the same Calvinist doctrine that did much to inspire Locke's thought concerning the possibility of basing political society upon compacts rather than divine right was already well established in America. Locke's innovation was to move the use of compact beyond the founding of a religious society of limited scope to the foundation of society at large. Foster shows that during the Reformation in Europe the precedent was set by contrary thinking Protestants to disassociate themselves from the sect in which they found themselves and, through the use of voluntarily agreed upon compacts, to instantiate a new society around a commonly held set of religious beliefs. Foster lists some of these events: "the Dutch Declaration of Independence, 1581; the Huguenot civil wars culminating in the Edict of Nantes, 1598; Bocskay's Hungarian revolt of 1606" and several others.⁸⁸ Foster claims that Locke's idea of the voluntary formation of community based upon written compacts was merely the generalized notion derived from the Calvinist tradition of church formation. Locke had actually himself drawn up "a written constitution for a church of the Independent,

⁸⁷Parrington, *Main Currents*, 148-151.

⁸⁸Foster, "International Calvinism Through Locke," 476.

Huguenot type," and he had also the experience of drawing up a constitution for the colony of Carolina.⁸⁹

Foster also shows with convincing detail that Locke had been much affected by various Calvinist thinkers. Locke apparently studied history at Oxford under Lewis du Moulin. Professor du Moulin "studied in the Huguenot universities, took his degrees at Geneva . . . and Puritan Cambridge and Oxford."⁹⁰ We must also remember that Locke lived in France from 1675 until 1679 where he observed the Huguenots' church services and sermons. According to Foster, Locke concluded that the doctrine of the Huguenots "did not differ from that of Presbyterians or Church of England, and that their church, founded on voluntary consent, like that of Nimes, resembled both the primitive church and his own ideal."⁹¹

Keeping with the thought that bourgeois interests played a major role in the American Revolution, we should see that just as the chafing discomfort of political and economic domination inspired revolution, so too did theological domination. Just as the class of yeoman farmers and shopkeepers found their interests expressed in the politics of Locke, so too they found their interests expressed in his theology. This class of bourgeois Americas whose selfish interest in economic gain was applauded by Locke and the Constitution, needed a theology that allowed them that selfish interest. And it was the Lockean/Calvinist theology that did so.

⁸⁹Foster, "International Calvinism Through Locke," 489.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 480.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 481.

A Preliminary Critique of Locke and His View of Human Nature

Though Lockean thought quickly came to dominate in both Europe and America, there was, almost immediately, progressive opposition to his ideas. All those who opposed Locke were not necessarily defenders of a monarchical or aristocratic polity, as we have seen with Voltaire. In the opening years of the nineteenth century, the French philosopher Maine de Biran was actively engaged in a substantial critique of Locke and especially of Locke's psychology. The current study is not the place for an extended examination of Biranism, but I do wish to show that already in the first years of the nineteenth century progressive thinkers were finding inadequacies in Locke and working to overcome them.

The core of Biran's critique concerns Locke's understanding of human psychology; the mind as portrayed by Locke is much too passive. Biran understood that Locke's view of reflection was particularly troublesome; for Locke reflection was a passive rather than an active use of the mind. Lucien Even, summing up Biran's position, says,

According to Maine de Biran, it is necessary to maintain to the end the activity of the mind [*esprit*], such that reflection manifests this activity, and not to let it be abused by the image of a mind [*esprit*] which would be pure *tabula rasa*; failing this, the risk is great of extending the passive character of the ideas of sensation to the ideas of reflection and of affecting reflection itself with a fundamental *receptivity*, like that of sensation.⁹²

Thus, already in the opening years of the nineteenth century we find that thoughtful critics of Locke realized that he had set the stage for a too passive understanding of human psychology.

⁹²Lucien Even, *Maine de Biran: Critique de Locke* (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Éditions de L'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1983), 94.

More recently, Alasdair MacIntyre has developed a comprehensive critique of liberalism. In his book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre contends that Lockean liberalism makes an impossible claim to a universal and ahistorical set of founding beliefs, particularly the notion of rationality, which MacIntyre understands as historically contingent.⁹³ This critique of the liberal idea of rationality strikes to the core of liberalism itself, since, as Locke so plainly says, it is human rationality that grounds the claims to both freedom and equality. “The *Freedom* then of Man and Liberty of acting according to his own Will, is grounded on his having *Reason*, which is able to instruct him in that Law he is to govern himself by, and make him know how far he is left to the freedom of his own will.”⁹⁴ Locke concludes that “Lunatics and Ideots” cannot be free since such a person does not attain “to such a degree of Reason, wherein he might be supposed capable of knowing the Law, and so living within the Rules of it. . . .”⁹⁵ The same argument is presented by Locke for the case of equality. Children and others who have yet to attain a sufficient degree of reason cannot be equal. “*Children*, I confess are not born in this full state of *Equality*, thought they are born to it. . . . Age and Reason, as they grow up, loosen them [the control of parents and elders] till at length they drop quite off, and leave a Man at his own free Disposal.”⁹⁶

⁹³Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

⁹⁴Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. II, §63.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, bk. II, § 60.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, bk. II, § 55.

This criterion of rationality for the possession of freedom and equality went on to play a wholly dishonorable role in the justification of slavery and imperialism. Since non-European peoples did not possess this universalized notion of rationality (which was actually just a manifestation of the Enlightenment era of Europe), they could be and were, in accord with Locke's theory and later in accord with J. S. Mill, treated as inferiors who had no right to freedom or equality and, hence, had no right of self-governance. This narrow conception of rationality allowed John Stuart Mill, a man in the liberal tradition, to justify the imposition of colonial powers in Africa, South America, and Asia.⁹⁷ We need only recall the seemingly innocuous subjugation of the man Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* to realize the consequences of the Lockean understanding of the connection between rationality and freedom.

My own sense of the nature of Lockean liberalism is that at its core resides a notion of human nature that assumes a radical individuation. That is to say, the individual is inherently free, equal, and rational. The ground of this view of human nature is the Calvinist Christian theology that Locke argues for in the *First Treatise*. It necessarily involves the sovereignty of each person with regard to all others. Even the social contract cannot overcome this individual sovereignty. In modern times, this Calvinist theological core has, for the most part, been replaced with a set of social science assumptions—grounded in modern psychology. We will look more closely at Lockean psychology at the end of the next chapter.

⁹⁷Bhikhu Parekh, "Liberalism and Colonialism: A Critique of Locke and Mill" in *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*, ed. Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh (London: Zed Books LTD, 1995), 81-98.

Thus Lockean liberalism, as commonly understood, has its core in a notion of the person as radically individuated and sovereign. And it is this core that supports both a view of minimal government and a *laissez-faire* attitude toward business. Lockean liberalism claims that all government (or political society) is of necessity a constraint upon this natural state of freedom. We enter into government, or political society, only hesitantly; we understand that the security of political society is purchased at the cost of some part of our natural freedom. In the same way, *laissez-faire* capitalism is supported by this Lockean liberal presumption of natural freedom. Any restraint placed upon the commercial interest of any person is seen as an affront to our natural and god-given freedom. We are left with but a vitiated theory of human nature, built upon the absolute priority of the individual, that renders the possibility of human community highly problematic.

Some scholars have remarked on the reticence of even academic researchers to look beyond the facile assumptions of the Lockean liberal position. Mehta says,

It is, I think, a striking feature of much of recent Locke scholarship that it accepts the characterization of the individual in terms of freedom, equality, and rationality as foundational. This is meant to indicate that these attributes literally serve as the foundation or base on which it is assumed subsequent claims rely. The stability and coherence of these notions is thus taken for granted. To be more precise, the individual conceived in terms of natural freedom, rationality, and equality is taken to be a sufficiently stable and coherent conceptualization and who, for that very reason, can serve as the foundational base from which to consider the normative question of what institutions comport with the interests and natural rights of such an individual.⁹⁸

⁹⁸Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom*, 83.

Thus it should be of great importance to expose these metaphysical assumptions to intelligent scrutiny. What Mehta calls the “psychological and cognitive drives underpinning these notions” are all too rarely looked for. This reticence for critical evaluation has allowed Lockean liberal ideas of innate freedom, rationality and equality to become “enclosed . . . within a hardened shelter imbued with a presumptive coherence.”⁹⁹ It becomes almost impossible to suggest that our natural human state might not be one of freedom, equality, and rationality. One of the few persons to understand this problem, Harold Laski saw the inadequacy of the Lockean understanding of human nature.¹⁰⁰

Our failure to see the inadequacy of the Lockean view concerning human nature, together with a sort of hubris concerning the priority of the individual, is at the core of liberalism’s overwhelming popularity. The facile assumption of freedom, equality, and rationality ignores the whole institutional and historical context within which each person is born and matures. In reality, it can only be after a long process of maturation and education that any person may legitimately claim to possess the three hallmarks of the Lockean human being. Mehta goes on to claim that by ignoring the multitude of institutions at work in the formation of each person (e.g., the family, schools, big business, and law enforcement), we

obscure our views of that vast constellation of interlinked associations that both historically and currently comes under the umbrella of liberalism. . . . It is these and similar omissions that

⁹⁹Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom*, 84.

¹⁰⁰Harold Laski, *Political Thought in England: From Locke to Bentham* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

underlie and sustain the hubris of platitudes such as that liberalism considers all individuals as naturally free, rational, and equal.¹⁰¹

Any serious examination of Locke should prove that he does *not* claim that these three fundamental human qualities are natural and inborn, needing no development. A careful reading of Locke shows rather that he realized the requirement for the development of these qualities, or really of rationality, for the other two derive directly from it. Locke says in various places in his writings that all persons are not in actuality free, equal, and rational.¹⁰² Of particular interest is what Locke says in his *Second Treatise*.

Though I have said above . . . *That all Men by Nature are equal*, I cannot be supposed to understand all sorts of *Equality*: *Age or Virtue* may give Men a just precedence: *Excellency of Parts and Merit* may place others above the Common Level: *Birth* may subject some, and *Alliance or Benefits* others. . . .¹⁰³

Locke goes on to specifically address children.

Children, I confess are not born in this full state of *Equality*, though they are born to it. Their Parents have a sort of Rule and Jurisdiction over them when they come into the World, and for some time after, but 'tis but a temporary one. The Bonds of this Subjection are like the Swadling Cloths they are wrapt up in, and supported by, in the weakness of their Infancy. Age and Reason as they grow up, loosen them till at length they drop quite off, and leave a Man at his own free Disposal.¹⁰⁴

It should be obvious to the careful reader that freedom, equality, and rationality are all in need of development and are not the merely natural

¹⁰¹Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom*, 85.

¹⁰²See Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, § 1, 33, and 38; *Two Treatises*, bk. II, § 54, 55.

¹⁰³Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. II, § 54.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, bk. II, § 55.

inheritance of all human kind. Nonetheless, Locke is often supposed to claim that these three core qualities are wholly innate, natural, and needing no development. Since the Lockean liberal position maintains the natural human inheritance of freedom, equality, and rationality, education for freedom within the Lockean liberal perspective becomes pointless. We can look again to Mehta and his more adequate understanding of the Lockean view of human nature.

When one accepts the foundational assumptions of freedom, rationality, and equality as defining the individuality of the Lockean self who now requires only political society to ensure peace and order, one overlooks the depth and acuity of this need. For Locke as for liberalism, individuality is an aspiration, a process of coming-to-be, and not a foundational given that liberal political institutions are merely designed to regulate and secure.¹⁰⁵

Despite Mehta's attempt (and those of others), the Lockean liberal view of human nature continues to successfully ignore the reality that freedom, rationality, and equality must be developed and are not innate human qualities. Yet, this peculiar understanding of Locke was not only the single most pervasive view of human nature in eighteenth century America, it continued and continues to exercise an overwhelming influence throughout the entirety of American history.

We are not yet ready to take up our major concern: education for freedom. Though the Lockean liberal idea of freedom came early to America, it has not substantially dissipated. We must trace its course through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Then we can examine its influence on education for freedom and examine the alternatives to it.

¹⁰⁵Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom*, 127.

CHAPTER THREE
THE LOCKEAN LEGACY INTO THE NINETEENTH AND
TWENTIETH CENTURIES

Liberal theory is unlivable.

—Maureen Whitebrook, *Real Toads in Imaginary Gardens*

The historian Louis Hartz could write in 1955:

Here is a Lockian doctrine which in the West as a whole is the symbol of rationalism, yet in America the devotion to it has been so irrational that it has not even been recognized for what it is: liberalism. There has never been a 'liberal movement' or a real 'liberal party' in America: we have only had the American Way of Life, a nationalist articulation of Locke which usually does not know that Locke himself is involved. . . . Ironically, 'liberalism' is a stranger in the land of its greatest realization and fulfillment.¹

We have seen how Lockean ideas, taken up by the rising bourgeois class, came to be identified with liberalism and the "American Way of Life" in general. For most Americans, there was no need to return to the philosophical ground of their ideas; this is a nation that prides itself on its lack of historical continuity, on its radical break from the past. That Lockean liberalism is the foundation of the political thought of the founding fathers, was poured forth from the pulpits, and pervaded American cultural life was

¹Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955), 10-11.

not important for the mass of Americans. In fact, it was the liberal idea itself (that humankind is born free, equal, and rational) that excused Americans from the need to further justify these very ideas.

Yet I have only set forth a sketch of Lockean liberalism in the eighteenth century. Could this "American Way" continue through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Hartz claims? Could this interconnected family of ideas concerning the innateness of freedom, the psychology of radical individualism, and the "natural" antipathy between freedom and government live on in a modern nation? It is the goal of this chapter to show exactly that continuity. This task will not be simple. Philosophers, historians, and authors of literature use a range of similar, but not identical, terms in their examinations of the idea of freedom. The term "Lockean liberalism" is John Dewey's.² Prior to his writing, this term has no widespread usage. And even today, it is not widely known. The historian Louis Hartz often writes of "irrational liberalism." Within these two terms (Dewey's and Hartz's) there is a common core. Both refer to a concept of innate freedom as well as a necessary antipathy between individual freedom and all forms of social organization. Hartz claims that America's brand of liberalism is "irrational" because it is simultaneously of enormous influence and unrecognized as liberalism. The political philosopher Michael Sandel and most writers of literature do not take up either Dewey's or Hartz's vocabulary and, instead, often refer simply to "liberalism." They are usually referring to something like the classical liberalism of James Burke and Adam Smith: *laissez-faire* liberalism. What

²See especially John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, in *John Dewey, The Latter Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 11: 1935-1937, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 6-9.

all of these terms share is, at least, two of the three core ideas of Lockean liberalism: that freedom is innate, that all forms of social organization are inimical to individual freedom, and a radical individualism. As we proceed into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we must look, again, to politics, religion, and the arts to trace the advance of this Lockean liberalism.

American Political Traditions

John Adams, writing in 1818, already felt the need to clarify the nature of the American Revolution. He understood at this early date that there was already a new generation of Americans who had no first-hand experience of the Revolution, the signing of the Constitution, and the building of the new nation. He needed to explain to these young Americans what the American Revolution was all about. Adams explained that "this radical Change in the Principles, Opinions, Sentiments and Affections of the People, was the real American Revolution."³ Thus, Adams understood the Revolution to have been essentially cultural rather than military or merely political.

In the early nineteenth century the presidency of Andrew Jackson restated the belief in minimal government. In his address to Congress of December 8, 1829, Jackson says "That this was intended to be a Government of limited and specific, and not general powers, must be admitted by

³John Adams, Quincy, letter to Mr. [Hezekiah] Niles, dated Quincy, February 13, 1818; quoted in *An American Primer*, ed. Daniel Boorstin (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1966; reprint New York: Meridian, 1995), 249.

all. . . ."⁴ One historian says that "Jackson's ideal in politics was the limited state of classical liberalism. The chief action of government was not to act, and the major issues of Jackson's Presidency bear witness to his ideal."⁵

Hartz reminds us of the active opposition to creation of labor unions. These unions were seen, especially, in the nineteenth century, as un-American. In fact, Hartz traces much of the opposition to any sort of public organization in America to what he calls the "Whigs." They were the wealthy class of politically retrograde Americans who fought against all but the most abstract idea of freedom. It was the "liberal irrationalism" of the Whigs who denounced even the idea of organization as contrary to the American way.⁶

In a speech in Madison Square Garden in October of 1928, President Herbert Hoover announced his vision of American liberalism. Hoover said that the state could not spread its influence into the realm of business without a necessary loss of freedom.

It is a false liberalism that interprets itself into the government operation of commercial business. . . . Liberalism should be found not striving to spread [government] bureaucracy but striving to set bounds to it. True liberalism seeks all legitimate freedom first in the confident belief that without such freedom the pursuit of all other blessings and benefits is vain. [Should government enter into a greater role in business] . . . It would stifle initiative and invention.

⁴Andrew Jackson, *Message from the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the First Session of the Twenty-first Congress, December 8, 1829* (Washington, D. C.: Duff Green, 1829); quoted in Boorstin, ed., *An American Primer*, 288.

⁵John William Ward, "Andrew Jackson, The Majority is to Govern," in Boorstin, ed., *An American Primer*, 293.

⁶Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, 223.

... It would extinguish equality and opportunity. It would dry up the spirit of liberty and progress.⁷

President Hoover had no doubt but that minimal government was the true form of liberal government and that a more active government could only destroy the freedoms that Americans held so dear.

In a recent article, "America's Search for a New Public Philosophy," Michael Sandel claims that the liberal idea of freedom continues to be the very definition of America.

The image of persons as free and independent selves, unbound by moral or communal ties they have not chosen, is a liberating, even exhilarating, ideal. Freed from the dictates of custom or tradition, the liberal self is installed as sovereign, cast as the author of the only obligations that constrain. This image of freedom found expression across the political spectrum.⁸

Sandel understands that the Lockean liberal idea is not peculiar to any political party or historical period in America. Contrary to the popular view, this idea of liberalism is the idea that pervades the whole of American life and politics. Sandel also diagnoses an essential conflict within the idea of liberalism itself. Sandel says,

The liberal self-image and the actual organization of modern social and economic life are sharply at odds. Even as we think and act as freely choosing, independent selves, we confront a world governed by impersonal structures of power that defy our understanding and control. The voluntarist conception of freedom leaves us ill equipped to contend with this condition. Liberated though we may be from the burden of identities we have not chosen, entitled though

⁷Herbert Hoover, "New York City" in *The New Day: Campaign Speeches of Herbert Hoover* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1928), 149-76; quoted in Boorstin, ed., *An American Primer*, 836-7.

⁸Michael Sandel, "America's Search for a New Public Philosophy," *The Atlantic Monthly* 277, no. 3 (March 1996), 66.

we may be to the range of rights assured by the welfare state, we find ourselves over-whelmed as we turn to face the world on our own resources.⁹

Modern liberal society has not prepared us to take active roles in the larger society. As isolated, atomized, individuals we may vehemently claim our natural state of freedom, but we have been rendered nearly helpless in the larger social world by precisely that kind of freedom. This conflict between the individual and the larger society that pervades liberalism is, in large part, what Hartz calls "irrational liberalism" and is a vital component of what has been referred to in this study as Lockean liberalism.

Contemporary American Political Philosophy

There is little doubt that Lockean ideas continue to be enormously influential at the very end of the twentieth century. John Rawls is probably the most highly respected American political philosopher, and he openly claims his Lockean heritage. Robert Nozick is another important political philosopher; he operates even more thoroughly within the Lockean tradition. In the preface to his well know *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls remarks that "What I have attempted to do is to generalize and carry to a higher order of abstraction the traditional theory of social contract as represented by Locke, Rousseau, and Kant."¹⁰ Rawls proceeds to say, "I shall regard Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, Rousseau's *The Social*

⁹Sandel, "America's Search," 72.

¹⁰John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1971), viii.

Contract, and Kant's ethical works beginning with *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* as definitive of the [social] contract tradition."¹¹

Nozick asserts that "Since considerations both of political philosophy and of explanatory political theory converge upon Locke's state of nature, we shall begin with that."¹²

But the more central question must be asked. Do Rawls and Nozick assert a Lockean liberal idea of freedom? As Nozick focuses upon the Lockean state of nature, so too does Rawls. However, Rawls reconceptualizes the Lockean state of nature into his own "original position." This hypothetical original position is logically prior to the organized society or political state and largely substitutes for Locke's state of nature. It is within the original position that decisions regarding the nature and constitution of the political state are made. We should remember that for Locke, all persons residing within the state of nature are free, equal and rational. Rawls makes these identical three qualities (along with one other: ignorance) the hallmarks of his original position. Rawls says "The principles of justice for the basic structure of society are the object of the original agreement. They are the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality. . . ."¹³ Rawls argues that persons within this original position possess qualities identical with those possessed by the Lockean person in the state of nature. Rawls adds that "human beings have a desire to express

¹¹Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 11n.

¹²Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 9.

¹³Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 11.

their nature as free and equal moral persons. . . ."¹⁴ Thus we find in Rawls a presumption that all persons are by nature free.

Yet Rawls does more than Locke to explain the social/political freedom that exists as something other than the original freedom of the original position. Rawls argues that each individual has enormous potential. That potential cannot be fully developed outside of society. "Thus we may say . . . that it is through social union founded upon the needs and potentialities of its members that each person can participate in the total sum of the realized natural assets of others."¹⁵ Rawls is saying that we need other people to develop their own potentials in order to free us from the need to develop each of those manifold potentials in ourselves; by so doing each person is released to develop his/her own potential and is thereby more free. Rawls goes so far as to say that "Only in a social union is the individual complete."¹⁶ Thus we may see Rawls upholding a sort of freedom that is different from and incompatible with that of the original position. In fact, Rawls does try to supersede the Lockean notion of freedom by postulating this social freedom that is possible only within society. Thus, though we may still understand that the freedom of the original position is lost or reduced when we enter into society, another valuable sort of freedom is made possible by that very society.

In his most recent major work, *Political Liberalism*, Rawls explicitly denies one of the cardinal virtues of Lockean liberalism. Rawls responds to a criticism from Habermas that liberal political philosophy has traditionally

¹⁴Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 528.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 523.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 525n.

been unable to resolve the dilemma between the personal and public autonomy of citizens. That is, Habermas claims that liberalism has not been able to deal adequately with the conflict between private freedom and the seeming loss of freedom with the advent of the social. Rawls says that "public and private autonomy are also both co-original and of equal weight . . . with neither externally imposed on the other."¹⁷ Rawls goes on to state that

The liberties of both public and private autonomy are given side by side and unranked in the first principle of justice. These liberties are co-original for the further reason that both kinds of liberty are rooted in one or both of the two moral powers, respectively in the capacity for a sense of justice and the capacity for a conception of the good. As before, the two powers themselves are not ranked and both are essential aspects of the political conception of the person, each power with its own higher-order interest.¹⁸

Though coming from a Lockean position, Rawls seems able to move beyond the shallow formulation of Lockean liberalism that puts freedom and society always in opposition to one another. However, Rawls' more developed and social freedom still relies upon an impoverished sense of the self. Sandel critiques Rawls' form of liberalism for its insistence that we divorce our private selves from our public selves. Rawls' liberal ideal is one lacking any sense of the good. Rather, Rawls constructs a complex procedural agenda that allows the search for the good but postulates no such good itself. In order to participate within the public/political construct of Rawls, it is necessary to leave behind all of one's moral, philosophical, and religious convictions. Thus Rawls requires that we deliberate on

¹⁷John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 412.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 413.

important national issues from within a greatly reduced, atomized, sense of self.¹⁹

Rawls' idea of a social freedom has not managed to enter into the larger public sphere. A spate of novels espousing Rawlsian freedom have not followed upon the heels of *A Theory of Justice*, like they did from Locke. And this is not likely to occur. I would contend that America remains much too enamored with its lonely heroes to turn to the production of new and more social heroes. *A Theory of Justice* was first published in 1971, and *Political Liberalism* in 1993. In the subsequent years there has been a resurgence of the Lockean liberal claim that government is essentially incompatible with freedom, though most supporters of this claim would not likely consider themselves to be part of any liberal tradition. This claim of the necessary antipathy between government and freedom has been made by Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Newt Gingrich, Bob Dole and many others. In the realm of the arts, we have seen no change in our national diet of atomized film and book heroes. Rawls' more social conception of humanity has not been able to compete with the "Terminator" in the popular mind.

In line with Lockean liberalism and in contrast to the work of Rawls, the political philosopher Robert Nozick claims that "no state more extensive than the minimal state can be justified."²⁰ The basis for this claim is his argument that states more substantial than the minimal state "violate

¹⁹Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1996), 17-19.

²⁰Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 297.

persons' rights not to be forced to do certain things. . . ."²¹ Nozick wrote *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* largely in response to Rawls. Nozick, as a more conservative thinker than Rawls, upholds the Lockean liberal antithesis between freedom and the state. This should not be surprising in a time of the active re-popularization of the notion of the minimal state.

Nozick does not develop his own theory of a state of nature or an original position. Rather, he presumes the whole of Locke's own state of nature as his point of departure. The problem Nozick possess for himself is simply this: given the state of nature, as explained by Locke, what kind of social organization would be its outcome. Nozick does not reassess Locke's state of nature; he merely assumes it wholesale.²² Therefore, it is not surprising that Nozick's solution to the problem he set should be that of the minimal state.

The Literature of Liberalism

The political scientist Maureen Whitebrook claims that literature has an important role to play in political philosophy, especially within liberal political philosophy. Whitebrook understands modern liberalism to include a central individualism and a conflict between the individual and the community.²³ These are two of the three defining properties of Lockean

²¹Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, ix.

²²Especially Chapter 2 of Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 10-12.

²³Maureen Whitebrook, *Real Toads in Imaginary Gardens: Narrative Accounts of Liberalism* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 11-12.

liberalism, the third being the innateness of freedom. She is convinced that "liberal theory is unlivable." That is, "the centrality of individualism as a theme in liberal thought should entail attention to the dilemmas faced by individuals in a liberal society, the moral aspect of human behavior."²⁴ However, what liberal political philosophy cannot do is to tell us how to live, how to live a good life. Whitebrook claims that literature has a powerful function in doing what political philosophy cannot do: literature can tell us how to try to live a good life within a liberal society.

Literature has a special capacity for illustrating and illuminating "lived reality." It can help restore to political thought a more adequately complex view of human nature: to complicate. It can, for example, be especially effective at exploring the realistic complexity of conflicts between the individual and the polis. Literature can present a coherent argument about politics in relation to the individual in a manner and to an effect not usually achieved by works of theory, which more often concentrate on particular aspects of what is, for the individual, experienced as a totality. Literature is better able than theory to cope with the perceived breakdown of liberal rationality in practice, offering an alternative to the narrowly rationalistic picture of human nature that still tends to dominate much political theory. Literature can assist thinking about the relationship between the rational and the non-rational, and in particular can help break down simplistic polarities between reason and emotion, reintroducing passion, irrationality, and a sense of evil, (and, conversely, a sense of the good and moral integrity) to political explanation and justification.²⁵

Lionel Trilling also observes this tendency toward simplification in political philosophy and in liberalism, being as they are so concerned with rationality. There is always a sense in which political theory and liberalism must "give up something of their largeness and modulation and complexity

²⁴Whitebrook, *Real Toads*, 12.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 2-3.

in order to survive."²⁶ But literature, thriving on complexity, is the perfect critical tool for liberal political philosophy. Trilling says, "Literature is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty."²⁷

The literary historian Vernon Parrington claims that there were two dominant themes controlling nineteenth century American culture. These themes were a French romanticism and an English liberalism. And though Parrington distinguishes the two, he claims that both share the view that human nature is essentially acquisitive. Whether this acquisitive nature was appeased on the backs of southern slaves, factory workers in New England, or at the expense of the native Americans in the western lands beyond the peaks of the Appalachians, the hallmark of nineteenth century America was the need to acquire.²⁸ In the mode of French romanticism, American culture is optimistic as to the perfection of humanity and embodies a "glorification of the ideal of individualism."²⁹ This ideal became a part of Unitarian theology and ultimately most appealed to proletarian interests of true communitarian ideals. Its nineteenth century manifestations include populism and Andrew Jackson. The parallel current of what Parrington calls "English liberalism" is equally optimistic in that it sees no boundaries to the possibilities of human perfection, but this

²⁶Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Viking Press, 1950), xiv-xv.

²⁷*Ibid.*, xv.

²⁸Vernon Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*, vol. 1, *The Colonial Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1958), iv-v.

²⁹*Ibid.*, vi.

perfection has commerce as its mode of development. "Springing forth from the same root of individualism that brought forth French romanticism, it [English liberalism] flowered in an economics that denied the aspirations of the French school."³⁰ This liberalism manifests itself in the person of Ralph Waldo Emerson and in the commercial elitism of New England, according to Parrington.

The nineteenth century cultural debate that Parrington points to is actually embodied in the writings of James Fenimore Cooper, especially in his exceedingly popular "Leatherstocking tales." Prior to about 1820, there was no distinctly American literature. Even Emerson claimed that the years between 1790 and 1820 were culturally barren.³¹ Cooper's first novel, *The Spy*, published in 1821, was immediately a popular success. But with the publication of *The Pioneers*, 1823, Cooper began to assure a permanent place for himself in American literature through his most famous character: Natty Bumppo. Bumppo, the rugged individualist and authentic man of the forests, continued into four additional, well-know, but decreasingly popular novels: *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841). Natty Bumppo lives on through all these books and becomes the archetype of the American pioneer. Before de Tocqueville set foot in America, Cooper already was employing Bumppo in his attempt to teach Americans "mental

³⁰Parrington, *Main Currents*, vol. 1, vii.

³¹Martin Green, "That God Neglected to Come: American Literature 1780-1820," in *The Penguin History of Literature*, vol. 8, *American Literature to 1900*, ed. Marcus Cunliffe, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1986), 79.

independence."³² Lionel Trilling calls Natty one of the "great characters of American fiction," comparable in stature with Melville's Captain Ahab. Such characters tend to be abstractions, ideas rather than concrete men. It is their "mythic" character that Trilling says makes them great.³³

Cooper decried the crass materialism of early Americans, and he created Natty Bumppo in opposition to the typical American. Beyond all of Cooper's expectations, he both succeeded and failed. Cooper's archetype has been continuously reinterpreted for later American tastes with the essential qualities of inner nobility and radical independence in tact. From Davy Crockett to Rambo, the archetype thrives in America. Yet, this model has come to represent exactly that which it was meant to oppose: the model American.

One of the reasons for the decline in the popularity of Cooper's books is his insistence on lecturing his readers on the evil of their ways. Cooper described the American scene as one of conflict; this conflict included, on the one hand, Natty and the romance of the wilderness. On the other hand, there lived the depraved settlers who despoiled the wilderness and massacred the native inhabitants. Cooper's settlers are typically rapacious creatures who will suffer nothing to stand in the way of their achievement of commercial success. Natty is the partisan of Parrington's French romance, while the sprawling and despoiling settlers represent English liberalism. The settlers destroy all that they touch and in so doing enrich

³²Kay House, "James Fenimore Cooper: Cultural Prophet and Literary Pathfinder," in *The Penguin History of Literature*, vol. 8, *American Literature to 1900*, 90.

³³Lionel Trilling, "Art and Fortune," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Viking Press, 1950), 262.

themselves financially. But they destroy themselves morally. Natty lives in a Earthly paradise always on the verge of destruction as the on-rushing settlers push westward.

It is ironic that the American liberal ideal was able to co-opt a character as antithetical to its interests as Natty Bumppo. But Hartz does claim that American liberalism has always been irrational in its application. Bumppo despised all that liberal society had to offer, but especially he despised its feckless greed. Nonetheless, this paradigm of the rugged individualist has become ubiquitous in modern business and industry. Early twentieth century Americans celebrated the likes of Carnegie and Rockefeller as pioneers of industry, as rugged individualists who by going against the grain win enormous success. Today our Natty Bumppos are Michael Milken and Ted Turner.

Thus, ultimately, Natty Bumppo failed to teach America the lesson he existed to teach. Natty's life shows that the liberal contract could not function as the foundation of a society. Such an agreement alone could not guarantee that people would work together for their common ends. Natty Bumppo, who along with the dispossessed native Americans, has no other option but to move away from the settlements and into the retreating wilderness. As society catches up with his flight, he moves again in search of a freedom that consists in not being part of any liberal society, preferring the society of wild places only.

The only community Natty knows is that of the noble Chingachgook, a Mohican. They share, much as Mark Twain's Hunk Finn and Jim will later, the fortunes of a life outside of liberal society. Natty and Chingachgook can never really fit into the bourgeois society represented by the white settlers. They continuously flee the destructive horde of white

men and women who seize possession of lands not theirs. Chingachgook and Natty, ultimately, only have each other. Without family or close friends, they live a life of simple nobility in accord with the laws of nature, which they prefer to the laws of men. Yet, their bond to one another cannot be deeper.

D. H. Lawrence's insightful account of Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook says it best.

Beyond all this heart-beating stand the figures of Natty and Chingachgook: the two childless, womanless men, of opposite races. They are the abiding thing. Each of them is alone, and final in his race. And they stand side by side, stark, abstract, beyond emotion, yet eternally together. All the other loves seem frivolous. This is the new great thing, the clue, the inception of a new humanity.³⁴

What is the secret of their community and their freedom? Quite simply, neither asks anything of the other, yet each happily gives all that he has for the other. They have founded a community of common care, and within its tiny space they feel the freedom of giving all of oneself to something greater than oneself.

One may doubt that Cooper himself understood the lesson that Natty and Chingachgook try to teach. Certainly, it is unlikely that most of his readers found it. In his writings, Cooper has much to say about freedom. He actually did believe that avaricious settlers were destroying the American wilderness, the new Eden. And when his novels failed to effect any change, Cooper wrote *The American Democrat*, a lengthy political tract, published in 1838. "We are then to understand by liberty, merely such a state of the social compact as permits the members of a community to lay no

³⁴D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Thomas Seltzer, Inc., 1923; reprint, New York: Viking Press, 1961), 59.

more restraints on themselves, than are required by their real necessities, and obvious interests."³⁵ Straight-forward Lockean liberalism: a form of community that had no place for a Natty Bumppo or a Chingachgook.

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is extolled by Lionel Trilling. He calls this novel "one of the world's greatest books and one of the central documents of American culture."³⁶ Hemingway went so far as to say that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*."³⁷ *Huckleberry Finn* is another book that seems to consist of a curious mix of Parrington's French romance and English liberalism. That is, the story is a tale of adventure in a sort of romantic paradise (the river) surrounded by the shores of English liberalism (commerce and greed).

Much, perhaps too much, has been written about this text. Yet it seems to have not yet been fully explained. On a fairly obvious level, it is a book about the constraints of society and the freedom of life outside of society. *Huckleberry Finn* can be seen to present a Lockean liberal view, requiring that we live apart in order to live free. Huck Finn is escaping from the Widow Douglas and the rest of the community who tried so hard to "civilize" him.

Harold Kaplan, in one of the better assessments of American literature and cultural values, says that in the end the book is a failure with regard to its understanding of freedom. Kaplan says, "To disappointed

³⁵James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat: A Treatise on Jacksonian Democracy* (Minerva Press, 1969), 43.

³⁶Lionel Trilling, "Huckleberry Finn," in *Liberal Imagination*, 105.

³⁷Ernest Hemingway, quoted in Trilling, *Liberal Imagination*, 117.

lovers of Mark Twain's book, the last quarter of the story seems trivialized because Jim's freedom has been compromised by Tom Sawyer's ritual games which cast Jim as comic scapegoat for an extended practical joke"³⁸ Trilling concurs with Kaplan in claiming that the ending of Twain's masterwork is seriously damaged by the overly long treatment of Jim's final escape as plotted by Tom Sawyer.³⁹ Such assessments sadly miss the deeper lesson of freedom that is taught by Twain. When we discover that Jim has been set free weeks earlier by his dying master, we must ask some questions. Did that act set Jim free? Would Tom Sawyer's complex plan have set Jim free? Or has Jim's freedom yet another source? The irony that Jim has been free in the legal sense for some weeks cannot lessen or supersede the real freedom that Jim and Huck lived on the raft. Their community was lived freedom. Huck fully realizes the value of that community when he finally decides not to return Jim to slavery. He remembers their life of mutual concern on the raft, the shared dangers and pleasures. Huck thinks,

I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now. . . .⁴⁰

³⁸Harold Kaplan, *Democratic Humanism and American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 244.

³⁹Lionel Trilling, "Huckleberry Finn" in *Liberal Imagination*, 115.

⁴⁰Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: An Annotated Text, Backgrounds, and Sources, Essays in Criticism*, ed. Sculley Bradley,

Neither the master's grant of freedom nor Tom Sawyer's ludicrous plot could in any real way set Jim free.

Before we leave the work of Mark Twain, I must remark that John Rawls claims that "justice is fairness."⁴¹ This idea can be seen taking up a line of thinking that goes back to *Huckleberry Finn*, written nearly a century earlier. Lionel Trilling in his analysis of *Huckleberry Finn* says that the characters Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn react to the adult world as if it were a conspiracy of lies. This recognition on the part of the two boys arouses their "moral sensitivity" and testifies to their "everlasting concern with justice, which they call fairness."⁴²

Daniel Defoe really was not wise enough to see what Twain seemed to realize and what Cooper sensed vaguely. That is, that community cannot be founded upon a contract; there must be a deeper tie. Both Cooper and Twain tell us that true community is the community of common care or the community of compassion. The social contract is but bourgeois instrument made to serve when no true community exists. But rather than exposing the inadequacy of the social contract, most philosophers and authors elevate the social contract to the status of foundation of all society. Defoe should (but never did) ask why Crusoe rescued Friday and the sea captain. Only with some pre-existing relation could Crusoe have taken on such a responsibility. The contract comes only later and only as an attempt to institutionalize and regularize the community that already must have

Richmond Beatty, and E. Hudson Long (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 167.

⁴¹See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter One: "Justice as Fairness," 3-53.

⁴²Lionel Trilling, "Huckleberry Finn," in *Liberal Imagination*, 105.

existed. The mistake of Locke and Defoe, and the whole of the social contract school, is to think that community comes into existence only with the contract. Nietzsche reminds us always to be aware of our tendency to mistake effects for causes. Locke would have the social contract itself be the cause of society, but truly it could be merely its effect. Only the bourgeois mind would make of the business contract the institution upon which all of civilization is founded.

Parrington's account of American culture concludes with a scathing attack on the "liberalism" that had betrayed democracy. By the very end of the nineteenth century, Parrington says, some Americans had begun to realize the idea of human perfectibility (a Lockean notion grounded in the idea of the *tabula rasa*) had been reinterpreted as a merely "material expansion with constantly augmenting profits," and democracy itself came to be understood as "the right to use the government of the whole for the benefit of the few."⁴³ We see something of a change in American literature; the very foundations of American beliefs are challenged. Muckraking and political criticism became exceedingly popular by the early twentieth century.

Parrington died before he completed his *Main Currents in American Thought*. Yet his outline of the final part of his final volume shows that he intended to write a lengthy reappraisal of American thought around the core idea of "liberalism." Only a short essay about liberalism was completed by Parrington. One of the hallmarks of American liberalism as identified by

⁴³Vernon Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, vol. 3, *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958/1930), xxv.

him is the absence of a history: the atomization of Americans.⁴⁴ We should remember that this radical individualism is a key aspect of the Lockean liberal idea of freedom. In broad strokes, Parrington goes about showing the early twentieth century as a burst of true democratic spirit. The muckrakers exposed the evil of big capital. Able historians and social scientists began to confront the comfortable assumptions of America with more radical interpretations.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the war brought an end to most of these radical reappraisals. And though the fiction of the age has its Sinclair Lewis, Parrington says that it was Theodore Dreiser who "most adequately and most thoroughly represented modern America."⁴⁶ Granville Hicks assesses Dreiser similarly in saying that "Dreiser has touched the fundamental forces that shape American life."⁴⁷

Dreiser created Frank Cowperwood, the ultimate man of finance, the paradigm of American liberal virtue. Dreiser's creation is the amoral man who lives in a material universe beyond hope of salvation: a brutal realism. Cowperwood does what the society wants him to do; he succeeds, and morality has nothing to do with it. One literary historian remarks of Dreiser's characters that because they see that "the chaotic nature of life precludes spiritual satisfaction, it is normal and right to take the most one

⁴⁴Parrington, *Main Currents*, vol. 3, 401.

⁴⁵Parrington points to J. Allen Smith's *The Spirit of American Government*, 1907, and Charles Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, 1913.

⁴⁶Parrington, *Main Currents*, vol. 3, xiv.

⁴⁷Granville Hicks, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 229.

can from the economic grab bag."⁴⁸ Cowperwood seems incapable of a lasting relationship with any woman as he moves from one mistress to another. No moral law applies to him, either at home or in business. His life is one conquest after another. His life is a literary manifestation of the Lockean liberal idea of freedom.

Lockean liberalism provides a freedom from traditional beliefs; it instantiated a new person outside of all relations: the man in the state of nature and as *tabula rasa*. Sociality itself is in need of construction; society does not pre-exist according to Lockean liberalism. By the early twentieth century, Americans were discovering that social relations had to be constructed, yet they had been given no tools for their construction. The Americans were indeed new Adams and new atoms. Dreiser was only pointing out the condition to which Lockean liberalism had inevitably brought us.

No account of American literature would be complete without mention of the West, or the frontier, as the manifestation of freedom. The single most pervasive symbol in American literature is that of the West. "The American West is almost by definition indefinite and indefinable, or at least changing, pluralistic, and ambiguous in signification."⁴⁹ This sense of openness and possibility that is the West can be seen as the manifestation of Locke's *tabula rasa*. Edwin Fussell's book on the West in American literature makes exactly this claim, here in reference to the "whiteness" of Melville's creation: Moby-Dick.

⁴⁸James Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), s.v. Dreiser.

⁴⁹Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), 4.

Nature is (or was) practically equivalent to the West. The West is (or was) practically equivalent to the American future. The future is by definition not yet determined, the page not yet written on, and thus, by way of unavoidable association with John Locke's *tabula rasa* (America's favorite epistemological concept), white.⁵⁰

We should now see that Cooper's West is the place where one can leave behind all of one's past and thus come into a renewed state of purity and freedom—the state in which Natty and Chingachgook resided. The river is Twain's West, and Jim and Huck find there their own new beginnings and therein live their own freedom. But the West is only the offer, only the possibility, of whiteness, renewal, and freedom. The settlers who brought with them their own pasts and refused to accept the West's offer of beginning anew never found what the West offered. It is perhaps no mere accident that in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* we find two sisters: Cora (dark and sensuous) and Alice (the White Lily). Cora is loved by Uncas, the noble last of the Mohicans, and by Magua, the desperate and evil leader of brutal Indian savages. Cora, brings with her into the openness of the wilderness her European values of womanly virtue; she dies. Alice, the innocent and pale younger sister, brings nothing of that European manner and resides in innocence. Alice survives and marries at the end of the tale. This coincidence of whiteness and darkness is fully noted by D. H. Lawrence.⁵¹

We cannot believe that Lockean themes are no longer to be found in American literature. Overt Lockean themes are now often taken up by American authors to show the inadequacy of Lockean liberalism. In a

⁵⁰Fussell, *Frontier*, 277.

⁵¹See D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 47-63.

rigorous examination of the work of Flannery O'Connor, John Roos finds Lockean ideas continue to play an important role. Roos shows that O'Connor's short story "A View of the Woods" is a comparison of the results of two ideas of property: the Lockean and the Thomistic. O'Connor's comparison of these two ideas is no merely academic enterprise. Roos says that, "Locke and Aquinas . . . are interesting to O'Connor only to the extent that their paths lead to alternatives alive here and now."⁵²

O'Connor's story "A View of the Woods" (first published in 1965) has two main characters: grandfather Fortune and his granddaughter Mary Fortune Pitts. Grandfather Fortune represents the Lockean individual. "Mary Fortune presents in concrete form someone who is living like her grandfather, but attempts to rise to a vision . . . that is beyond that of the pursuit of Lockean self-interest."⁵³ Grandfather Fortune sells some of his land to developers and watches with his granddaughter as the bulldozers begin to "develop" the land. The grandfather is in favor of "progress" and overtly claims that all people are "free and equal." The grandfather has allowed Mary's parents to farm this piece of land and worries that by their labor they will come to have some claim to the land. That is, they may be able to make a claim that interferes with his own freedom to do as he will with the land. When Mary objects to the sale of yet another piece of land, that would spoil her view of the woods, she actively resists the sale; her grandfather beats her. Mary fights back and nearly overcomes her grandfather. In the end, grandfather Fortune beats Mary's head into the

⁵²John Roos, "The Political in Flannery O'Connor: A Reading of 'A View of the Woods'," *Studies in Short Fiction* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1992), 161.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 165.

ground, killing her.⁵⁴ Grandfather Fortune has acted as the Lockean man of property within the state of nature; he has every right to destroy anyone who would threaten his right to dispose of his property as he sees fit; he is free.⁵⁵ However, now isolated from all natural relations and experiencing a heart attack, Fortune has no one to turn to and dies alone.

Roos claims that this story is about the "consequences of choosing the way of isolated individuals with no natural basis of morality, and no sacramental sense of nature."⁵⁶ The granddaughter is the very opposite of the Lockean isolated man. Like children everywhere, Mary desires the trust and affection of her family; she is prepared to live within a true community of common care, a community based on natural human compassion, the heavenly community of Aquinas. It is her father and her grandfather who atomize her through repeated physical abuse; she becomes a Lockean individual only through the brute force of others.

Though Roos claims that O'Connor goes back to Aquinas for an alternative to Locke, we should see the resemblance between the society depicted by O'Connor and that depicted by Twain and Cooper. All write about a community of common care in contrast with the community of contract. All of these authors at least suspect that the Lockean community cannot function as a true community without a stronger alliance underneath it and in support of it. Once that more basic community fails,

⁵⁴Flannery O'Connor, "A View of the Woods," in *Flannery O'Connor: The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, The Noonday Press, 1972).

⁵⁵Compare Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapter III, § 18.

⁵⁶Roos, "The Political in Flannery O'Connor," 172.

the Lockean community has merely its contract for support, and that support is incapable of upholding true community.

If looking for a modern critic of Lockean liberalism, it would be difficult to find a better representative than Saul Bellow. Whitebrook says that Bellow's *The Dean's December* (1982) and *More Die of Heartbreak* (1987) are vitally concerned with life in a liberal society. These novels are demonstrations of the tension between the society and the liberal individual. They are a demonstration of the failure of the political to "provide an order in which the two spheres, public and private, might be reconciled."⁵⁷

Notice how we may trace the liberal novel from the wholesale assumption of the good of liberal principals (in Defoe), to their acceptance with some suspicion of their less than complete adequacy (Cooper), to substantial doubts as to the direction of liberalism but the conviction of its truth (Twain), to the belief that society has gone astray but lacking a deep critique and still accepting liberal political philosophy as inevitable if no longer desirable (Dreiser), to the full realization of the radical failure of liberalism (O'Connor and Bellow). This should not convince us that the happy liberalism of Defoe is no longer with us. On the contrary. Those older accounts of liberalism are still very popular, especially in the mass medium of the Hollywood film. And even that paradigm of liberal atomism, *The Little Engine That Could*, has gotten its use in President Clinton's 1996 re-election campaign.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Whitebrook, *Real Toads*, 140.

⁵⁸*Chicago Tribune*, 28 August, 1996.

Liberalism and American Religion

The New World was largely perceived by devout Christians as a new world, as a promised land, a new Eden. It is a place where new beginnings are possible.⁵⁹ Christian faith with its central notion of rebirth in purity is a strict analog of Locke's *tabula rasa*. Even the Lockean language of contract theory was easily induced into Christian theology, being as it is a story of manifold covenants. Further, the early Christian settlers brought with them the conviction that the powers of man were, necessarily, limited. No one had the right to absolute authority, except God.

On the other hand, the Puritan settlers of America brought with them a theological understanding of freedom that had little to do with the Lockean notion. For the Puritans, and even today for fundamentalist Christians, human beings have no natural freedom. Christian freedom consists in absolute obedience to the will of God.⁶⁰ It was only after 1690 that Locke's ideas began to infiltrate mainstream Christian ideology. By the time of the American Revolution, Lockean Christianity was mainstream and Puritan theology had receded into the background.⁶¹

Jacksonian democracy and the advent of Transcendentalism are often understood as manifestations of an intuitionist response to the earlier Lockean empiricism. One historian claims that Transcendentalism was a

⁵⁹Richard Wentz, *Religion in the New World: The Shaping of Religious Traditions in the United States* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 23.

⁶⁰Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1969), 17.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 29-36.

“revolt against the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and a reaction against the unrestrained devotion of that era to the scientific method.”⁶² This is not an illogical assertion. However, Transcendentalism might be better understood as the fulfillment rather than the negation of the Enlightenment. What Transcendentalism attempted to do was to include the Self within the legitimate realm of empirical study. The older empiricism of Locke, under the influence of Descartes, insisted on a radical separation of Self and the world in order to better understand the world; the world was made “objective.” Transcendental thinkers sought to enlarge the realm of empiricism through their willingness to include the study of the Self through empirical means. Thus understood, Transcendentalism becomes the forerunner of the American Pragmatism of James and Dewey. Regardless of whether Transcendentalism is regarded as an intuitionist reaction against empiricism (and thus against Locke) or as the logical expansion of empiricism to include the Self as object of study, it is an American religious movement that is, to some extent, outside of Lockean liberal tradition, and will be taken up in significant depth later.

After the Civil War, American Christianity comes under the influence of Social Darwinism. This Darwinism appeals to bourgeois interests because of its empiricist and materialist terms. Social Darwinism is a return to the more hard-headed empiricism of Locke. Social Darwinism along with the later movement known as the Social Gospel (early twentieth century) were much effected by the results of the Industrial Revolution and the increasingly monopolistic hold that science had on truth. It was widely felt by church leaders that “unless the message of the church were to be

⁶²Singer, *Theological Interpretation*, 56.

made intellectually tenable and respectable, the church could not long survive in a scientific age. . . ."⁶³

The purveyors of the Social Gospel insisted that every age had the duty to rethink traditional theology and to decide what of it to accept, change, and reject. Essentially, the movement known as the Social Gospel taught that people had no obligations except those that they themselves had willingly accepted, a classic hallmark of Lockean liberalism. Each believer was free to decide which aspects of Christianity were true and which were to be ignored. This form of Christian belief was also overtly democratic. That is, the central tenets of the Social Gospel were individual sovereignty (rather than the sovereignty of God), and the freedom and equality of believers such that only willingly accepted obligations could be legitimate.⁶⁴

But even evangelical Christians were not outside of the Lockean tradition. A primary belief of evangelicals is individual rather than social salvation. Each person is a solitary atom before God, to be judged as an individual.⁶⁵ Also, evangelicals tend to distrust government and hold that it ought to be confined to strictly traditional parameters as set forth in the Constitution; government is seen as a threat to freedom.⁶⁶ In fact, evangelical Christians tend to see the move toward big government, as in the New Deal and the Great Society, as threats to freedom and as a

⁶³Singer, *Theological Interpretation*, 143.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 176-7.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 186.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 177.

movement toward such a level of governmental control as to be worthy of the name of totalitarianism.⁶⁷

In brief, we should see that theology and politics have always influenced each other. The Lockean insistence on individualism has not been at odds with traditional Christian thought; here Locke and Christianity easily accommodate each other. But the idea of the social contract, though ultimately derived from theological ideas, has influenced American Christians toward a more democratic notion of association. No church had the right to demand the allegiance of its people. In fact, churches are sources of suspect social demands; churches as social institutions were capable of infringing upon the theological freedom of believers. Thus, churches were heavily democratized. And Christians were freed from any bonds felt to be imposed from outside of the individual believer. Politics and theology have often gone together in American history. We should see the movement away from Puritan religion, at least in some substantial part, as due to Lockean ideas.

Lockean Psychology

In his extensive study, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Charles Taylor claims a substantial role for John Locke in the making of the modern self. Taylor says that the modern self is marked by "disengagement" and its correlate "objectification." Taylor traces the sources of the modern self back to medieval Christianity. But the first full enunciation of the disengaged self comes from Descartes. It was Descartes'

⁶⁷Singer, *Theological Interpretation*, 293.

radical skepticism with regard to even the self that marks the maturity of a notion of the self as no longer a subject but as an object. This objectification of the self results in "an instrumental stance to one's given properties, desires, inclinations, tendencies, habits of thought and feeling, so that they can be worked on, doing away with some and strengthening others. . . ." ⁶⁸ It makes one free to change and be changed; human beings have no predetermined human nature. This disengagement of the self and rendering of it a thing somehow objective functioned to allow for greater control of persons—an attitude that made control possible and desirable.

It may seem a contradiction that Locke should both claim that all persons are free and yet construct such a passive psychology, a psychology that allows for the greater control of people. Yet we should remember Laslett's claim: "Locke is, perhaps, the least consistent of all the great philosophers, and pointing out the contradictions either within any of his works or between them is no difficult task." ⁶⁹ In fact, it is exactly this combination of Locke's insistence upon innate freedom and his psychology of atomization that are, in large part, what I have been calling "Lockean liberalism" and what Hartz calls "irrational liberalism."

Descartes is credited by Taylor with the first full enunciation of the modern disengaged self, but this alienated self did not end in the seventeenth century. Taylor says that Locke took the next logical step. He rejected the notion of innate ideas, thus making the self even more pliable

⁶⁸Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 159.

⁶⁹Peter Laslett, introduction to *Two Treatises of Government*, by John Locke, student edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 82.

and subject to control. Additionally Locke reduces the mental processes of understanding to a construction out of "simple ideas." Thus ideas are themselves atomized. Further, Locke understands mental construction as merely a process of association and division rather than one of active synthesis and creative union. Locke says the following about "simple ideas":

The Dominion of Man, in this little World of his own Understanding, being muchwhat the same, as it is in the great World of visible things; wherein his Power, however managed by Art and Skill, reaches no farther, than to compound and divide the Materials, that are made to his Hand. . . .⁷⁰

These simple ideas are for Locke those received through sensation and reflection. Further Locke says that in regard to the reception of these simple ideas, "the Mind is only passive." But Locke also asserts that we may have "complex ideas," which Locke says include those of "Beauty, a Man, an Army, and the Universe." In the construction of all complex ideas, the mind has only three abilities: combining other simple or complex ideas, bringing ideas into association (rather than combination), and separating or abstracting ideas out of others.⁷¹ Remember the critique of Lockean psychology as put forth by Maine de Biran at the opening of the nineteenth century. Biran said that Locke understood human mental processes as essentially passive.

Taylor claims that, unfortunately, Locke's "radical disengagement and reification of human psychology were immensely influential in the

⁷⁰John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. and introduction by Peter Nidditch (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975/1690), bk. II, chapter II, § 2.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, bk. II, chapter XII, § 1.

Enlightenment."⁷² Taylor goes on to claim that it is exactly this disengaged self of Locke that encouraged and allowed for the growth of a wide range of disciplinary practices during the Enlightenment that had never previously been thought possible. In line with the thinking of Michel Foucault, especially in his *Surveiller et Punir*,⁷³ Taylor says that the Lockean self was directly responsible for the growth of mental hospitals, mandatory schooling, and various bureaucratic and mechanistic practices of organization and control.⁷⁴

The modern self as object, as the object of experimentation and overt manipulation has as its immediate ancestor Lockean psychology. We no longer know how to refer to ourselves in the first-person; we are third-person entities since Locke. Taylor goes so far as to claim that the Lockean self "permeates modern psychology," modern learning theory, and the "mature Freudian conception of the ego."⁷⁵

Freud understands the relationship between the individual and civilization as necessarily one of conflict. In his *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud says that "every individual is virtually an enemy of civilization." Further, he adds, "It is remarkable that, little as men are able to exist in isolation, they should nevertheless feel as a heavy burden the sacrifices which civilization expects of them in order to make a communal life

⁷²Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 173.

⁷³Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison* (To surveil and punish: birth of the prison) (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975). See especially section III, chapter one: "Les corps dociles," 137-171.

⁷⁴Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 173.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 174.

possible."⁷⁶ I will make no claim that Freud's understanding of this conflict is directly caused by his reading of Locke. However, Freud's understanding of the conflict between the individual and the larger society is yet another example of the extent to which this idea has become dominant within the modern world.⁷⁷

Emile Durkheim also contends that the individual and the society exist necessarily within a state of conflict. Within each of us Durkheim posits a dual nature; we are both personal and social beings. Durkheim says that

This duality corresponds to the double existence that we lead concurrently: the one purely individual and rooted in our organism, the other social and nothing but an extension of society. The origin of the antagonism that we have described is evident from the very nature of the elements involved in it. . . .

In fact, however, society has its own nature, and, consequently, its requirements are quite different from those of our values as individuals: the interests of the whole are not necessarily those of the part. Therefore, society cannot be formed or maintained without our being required to make perpetual and costly sacrifices.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, standard edition, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961/1927), 6-7.

⁷⁷For a more complete exposition of Freud's understanding of the antithetical relation between the individual and the society see his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviera (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961/1930).

⁷⁸Emile Durkheim, "The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions," trans. Charles Blend, in *Emile Durkheim On Morality and Society: Selected Writings*, ed. and introduction by Robert Bellah (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 162-3.

Conclusion

There can remain but little doubt that the ideas of John Locke have been and continue to be enormously influential in the United States. Lockean liberalism with its insistence upon the innateness of freedom, the antithetical relationship between freedom and society, and the underlying psychology of radical individualism pervades the whole history of the American discussion of freedom. The Lockean liberal notion in political and cultural thought is central to our understanding of America and for our understanding of the way this nation has educated its citizens *qua* citizens. Within the Lockean liberal paradigm, there is little need for any active process of education to ensure freedom. Rather, as we will see in the next chapter, education for freedom in America has largely concerned itself with basic literacy and the rudiments of national history, usually both strongly imbued with patriotic and moralistic platitudes.

CHAPTER FOUR
EDUCATION FOR FREEDOM WITHIN THE PARADIGM
OF LOCKEAN LIBERALISM

That which you inherit from your fathers/You must earn in order to possess.

—Goethe, *Faust*

Any discussion of education for freedom would likely seem out of place at the time of the American Revolution. One searches in vain for such a phrase in the discussions of the times. The modern notion of education for freedom is partially obscured by three closely related ideas of education prevalent through most of the history of America. These ideas are religious/character education, literacy, and citizenship education. As we have already established that Lockean liberal ideas proliferated throughout American history, we should find that these three ideas of education for freedom are deeply imbued with the Lockean liberal conception of freedom.

After the founding of the American nation, there was considerable debate concerning the possible need for a national system of education. Many educated Americans in the late eighteenth century felt that Europe was a land of prejudice and bias: an unscientific land. If Americans were to fulfill the promise of the Enlightenment, they had to free American minds.¹

¹Allen Hansen, *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 47.

This liberation of the American mind from the unscientific and primitive manner of Europe was to be accomplished through an education that could inculcate an impartial attitude; this attitude would be the result of an education based upon scientific knowledge rather than traditional biases.² Throughout the history of American education there is a sub-text of liberation theory; many of the brightest writers on the subject of education believe that education is, in itself, liberating. Education for these writers and thinkers is a process of attaining a more critical/scientific manner of thinking and not indoctrination or the storing up of facts.

Benjamin Rush published his *Thoughts upon the Mode of Education proper in a Republic* in 1786. Rush understood that education made the man; he thoroughly took up the Lockean idea of the *tabula rasa* and intended to actively form Americans. These Americans were to be useful, scientific, and have a large dose of republicanism. These character traits were to be imparted to Americans through a more scientific education that ignored the study of Greek and Latin. These ancient languages were the basis of the traditional pattern of educational bias so prevalent in Europe and were thought to represent some the restraining and unscientific nonsense that so limited Europe.³ Of course, republicanism, being the result of Enlightenment thought, was itself scientific. There is an equation of freedom with scientific processes in the thought of Rush that is familiar to most Enlightenment thinkers.

Of course, Thomas Jefferson thought that education was essential for the citizens of the United States. Jefferson wrote:

²Hanson, *Liberalism and American Education*, 261.

³*Ibid.*, 54.

Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. Enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve them. And it requires no very high degree of education to convince them of this. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.⁴

Thus we find Jefferson contending that mass education is necessary for the preservation of liberty in the United States. In his plan for a comprehensive school system in the state of Virginia, Jefferson asked that free and public education for three years be provided to all children.⁵ John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, considered “knowledge to be the soul of a Republic.” John Adams wanted schools for the instruction of people in their moral, Christian, and civic duties. In short, all of the founding fathers knew that education was a necessary condition for a republic to thrive.⁶

Nonetheless, no national system of public education has ever existed in the United States. Only half of the original states made any mention of schooling in their first constitutions.⁷ American public education was overwhelmingly neglected until the 1820s. Up until this time, education

⁴Thomas Jefferson, letter to James Madison, dated Paris, December 20, 1787, in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Random House, 1993/1944), 407.

⁵Ellwood Cubberley, *The History of Education: Educational Practice and Progress Considered as a Phase of the Development and Spread of Western Civilization* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1948/1920), 525.

⁶*Ibid.*, 526-7.

⁷Ellwood Cubberley, *Readings in Public Education in the United States: A Collection of Sources and Readings to Illustrate the History of Educational Practice and Progress in the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 107.

was widely considered (despite the work of Jefferson, Rush, and others) a private matter, to be accomplished by the family and the church. The wealthy paid for the education of their children; the poor, if they were lucky, received some little education through local churches, modest community schools, and what little their parents could provide.⁸

Introduction to Education for Freedom

If an adequate argument concerning the continuous influence of Lockean liberal ideas in American education is to be made, we must trace its path through its manifestations in American educational history. Though moral/character education and education for literacy have existed in America since well before the Revolution, civic education is a relative newcomer. It was not until the success of the American Revolution that citizenship education had a substantial presence, and it was only during the Jacksonian era that citizenship education is widely acknowledged to be vital to America. Thus, our next task is to sketch the history of American education's concern with character, literacy, and citizenship in order to demonstrate how the Lockean liberal notion of freedom controlled, and continues to control, each of these and, hence, control education for freedom in the United States.

Character education has long been a prime concern of education. In strict Puritan (and modern fundamentalist) Christian terms, freedom

⁸James Mursell, *Education for American Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1943), 60. See also Lawrence Cremin, *The American Common School: An Historic Conception* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951), 86-88.

consists of obedience to the will of God. This obedience must be willingly given. Puritan education, therefore, takes as its central task the formation of persons who voluntarily obey God. Thus, character education and religious education are closely linked. As typically formulated, Christian thinkers claim that one must be either a servant of God or a servant of Satan. One's freedom then consists in willful obedience to God. The continuity of character education in America is testified to in a great many books.

The schoolbooks of Noah Webster, as well as those of modern writers, demonstrate the continuous concern with the education of character in American schools, as we shall see. James Mursell, a philosopher of education writing in 1955, asserts that "the supreme and central function of the school is to develop character."⁹ The contemporary political philosopher Amy Gutmann says that "public schools in a democracy should serve our interests as citizens in the moral education the future citizens."¹⁰ All of this is perfectly in accord with Locke's assertion that "'Tis Virtue then, direct Virtue, which is the hard and valuable part to be aimed at in Education. . . . All other Considerations and Accomplishments should give way and be postpon'd to this."¹¹ The concern for character education, especially in schoolbooks, is in part explained by the origins of these books. Long before the mass production of

⁹James Mursell, *Principles of Democratic Education* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1955), 77.

¹⁰Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 54.

¹¹John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 5th ed. (London: A. & J. Churchill, 1705) in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. and introduction by James Axtell (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 170.

schoolbooks there was already a mass production of courtesy books. These books had functioned since the middle ages to instruct in socially appropriate behavior. Some historians trace the origins of the modern schoolbook back to the popular courtesy books.¹²

Education in basic literacy has a long history in the United States. It was already a common notion in colonial America that education in the basics of reading was the foundation of a democratic and free nation. The Puritan settlers had very early insisted that all children within their communities be taught to read, lest they fall into slavish sinfulness with the Devil due to their inability to read the word of God. Not only did the Puritans and other Protestant sects strongly believe in the necessity of Bible reading, but a substantial number of the early settlers in America were themselves well educated and provided a high level of education to their children. The modern historian of education, Lawrence Cremin, understands literacy to be fundamental to American freedom. Cremin says that "access to printed materials . . . in its very nature opens a person's mind to change, to new ideas and influences, to new goals and aspirations."¹³ But this openness to change is not itself freedom. "Whatever else freedom means, it does mean genuine choice, the awareness of real alternatives that can be acted upon." And, even though, Cremin admits that literacy can be

¹²Michael Belok, *Forming the American Minds: Early School-Books & Their Compilers, 1783-1837* (Moti Katra, India: Satish Book Enterprise, 1973), 48.

¹³Lawrence Cremin, *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 33.

used to constrain thought, he sees literacy as essential for the interchange of ideas required in a democratic society.¹⁴

Citizenship education became a concern only after the Revolution. There was in early America, and has been repeatedly in times of substantial immigration, the conviction that Americans needed a schooling in citizenship that is wholly different from that of non-democratic nations. New immigrants, especially, needed a tuition in American citizenship; in early America there were a great many persons who had once been citizens of the European monarchies.¹⁵ The word most commonly used to describe the new American democracy was "republic." The republic is a form of indirect democracy; citizens do not actually govern but elect representatives who govern. Thus it was, and continues to be, thought important that citizen-electors have sufficient information and deliberative capacity to make intelligent decisions in choosing representatives. A major part of citizenship education in America has always been an education in history.¹⁶

R. Freeman Butts points to an important dilemma in citizenship education. Because the common (Lockean liberal) understanding of freedom places all freedom in jeopardy due to most actions of government, any attempt of government, on whatever level, to instruct in freedom is perceived as a threat to freedom. Americans have long doubted that

¹⁴Cremin, *Traditions of American Education*, 35.

¹⁵Cremin, *American Common School*, 44-46.

¹⁶The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, "Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools," in *Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education*, ed. Paul Gagnon (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 45.

government ought to be involved in political education.¹⁷ The compromise solution seems to be an education in citizenship that agrees with the most common political feelings of Americans and is, as we shall see, quite empty of contentious content.

Education for Freedom Before the Civil War

Already by the middle of the eighteenth century, the power of religious schools had declined in America. Cubberley states that by 1750 much of the nation had broken away from the tightly centralized control of religious town governments. Consequently, "colonial governments had been forced to exercise an increasing state oversight of the elementary school."¹⁸ We should not, thereby, understand that religious education was not important at this time. Rather, what had occurred was that religious education was now being undertaken by many local governments in addition to non-religious education. Certainly there were still church schools as well as religious education going on in homes and churches. The founding fathers had hoped that the government would, early on, take a substantial role in the construction of large-scale systems of education. This was not to occur. The rudimentary community schools of the late eighteenth century were not enough to give the necessary guidance to the

¹⁷R. Freeman Butts, *The Revival of Civic Learning: A Rationale for Citizenship Education in American Schools* (n.p.: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1980), 51.

¹⁸Cubberley, *History of Education*, 439.

American people. Thus there was little opposition to churches continuing an active, though somewhat reduced, role in the provision of education.¹⁹

Early colonial schoolbooks, the *New England Primer* being the best known, taught strict obedience to God, the King, and parents.²⁰ Clearly, obedience to the King would soon be inappropriate in American schools. But religion and obedience were to stay for a great while. Thomas Dilworth's very popular *New Guide to the English Tongue*, 1740, was more than a reader, speller, and grammar. It contained many prayers. On its title page, the *New Guide* claimed that it was "recommended by several clergymen and eminent school masters." Daniel Fenning's *The Universal Spelling Book*, 1788, included chronological tables of sacred history.²¹ Noah Webster's own account of the schooling he received in Connecticut in the 1760s claims that the texts he used were "chiefly or wholly Dilworth's Spelling Books, the Psalter, Testament, and Bible."²² All of these texts demonstrate the popular concern that schools instill Christian character in the young.

¹⁹Lorraine Pangle and Thomas Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 187.

²⁰For instance, the *New England Primer* presents the following lesson for children: "I will fear God and honor the King. I will honor my father and mother. I will obey my superiors. I will submit to my elders." *The New England Primer: A History of Its Origin and Development*, ed. and introduction by Paul Ford (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1887; reprint, New York: Teachers College Press, 1962), n.p. Ford's text includes a facsimile copy of the *Primer* published in Boston by S. Kneeland & T. Green in 1727 from which the above quotation is taken.

²¹Agnes Benedict, *Progress to Freedom: The Story of American Education* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), 46.

²²Cubberley, *History of Education*, 440.

After the American Revolution, new books by American masters were written for the now American school children. Webster's *American Speller* replaced Dilworth's *New Guide*. But the methods of education were still largely rote. The need to recite answers, word for word, remained (and would remain for a long time). In a format taken from the various Christian catechisms, a new national catechism was created by the textbook writers. School children were asked "What is the government of the United States?" They were expected to respond, unvaryingly, with these words: "Republican. The different states are free and independent, confederated under the general government of a President, Vice-President, and Congress."²³ The new republican nation seems to have had little use for encouraging independent thinking.

Unlike modern times, where one readily finds direct reference to citizenship education, early American school curricula do not mention citizenship. The "reading schools" and the "writing schools" of Boston in 1790 were, as their names imply, primarily schools for the teaching of reading and writing. The Latin grammar schools were concerned almost solely with instruction in Latin. An examination of the curricula of the Boston schools of 1790 shows no obvious concern for what we might call education for democracy, freedom, or citizenship. One might assume that a good grounding in Latin grammar and practice in the reading of Latin classics could provide something of that larger sense of self and an appreciation of an enlarged frame of intellect, but this was not mass education. The concern of the Boston schools in 1790 was basic literacy for the poorer children, to which was added a knowledge of Latin for the richer,

²³Benedict, *Progress to Freedom*, 82.

always within the traditional concern for the formation of good character through Christian moral instruction.²⁴

Yet, even without courses and textbooks titled American history or American government, students were instructed in these fields as well as in Christian morality. The various “readers” and “spellers” employed in early American schools were functional well beyond the parameters suggested by their modest titles. These texts taught the fundamental ideas of America, including that of freedom within a republic. Webster’s *American Speller* contained not only word lists but also Christian fables, reminders of the honesty of George Washington, and the idea of republican government. Included was a sort of republican catechism, i.e., lessons to be learned by rote that extolled the republican form of government.²⁵ Webster’s *Third Part* (a reader) stated boldly on its title page that the book was intended to instruct young people in “geography, history, and politics of the United States.”²⁶ Thus, although the widespread use of formal history, geography and civics texts was not seen until after the Civil War, the earlier spellers and readers did provide explicit instruction in these fields, particularly through their choice of materials to be read.

Though the founders of the United States strongly felt that education was essential to the life of a republican government, the Constitution made no provision whatsoever for education. Thus education was left to the individual states. Still, only about half of the first states mentioned

²⁴Cubberley, *Readings in Public Education*, 81-2.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 268.

²⁶Noah Webster, *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking* (Hartford, Connecticut: Hudson & Goodwin, 1789); reprint, (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 1.

education in their constitutions—and then, usually, only to encourage the establishment of schools, not to actually fund them. The Vermont Constitution of 1777 is an exception; it stipulates that “schools shall be established in every town” and that salaries for school masters are to be “paid by each town.”²⁷ The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 makes explicit reference to the usefulness of education to the continuation of society but establishes no mechanism for the funding of education. All the schools of the state, from Harvard College to the lowliest public school, are charged to “inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings; sincerity, good humor, and all social affections and generous sentiments among the people.”²⁸ In short, the schools were intended to form persons of character. But most states allowed individual communities to decide how much and what kind of education, if any, was to be provided at public expense. For the majority of Americans in the early and middle 1800s, there were no free public schools. Cubberley gives the following averages for total amounts of schooling received by Americans in various years: 1800, four months; 1840, ten months; and 1850, twenty-two months.²⁹

It should not be surprising that there was so little public education in the decades before and after the American Revolution. If there was the idea that the continuation of liberty was dependent upon education, it was also

²⁷Cubberley, *Readings in Public Education*, 107.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 109.

²⁹Ellwood Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 219-222.

evident that only those most directly concerned with governing required substantial education. Since the early colonial era, there had always been restrictions on the right to vote. The early colonies founded for religious reasons did not allow citizenship rights to members of other religions, and most colonies imposed some form of land-holding or tax-payment requirement in order to vote or hold office. In fact, the aristocrats of New York became so disturbed that common men, like tailors and carpenters, were voting and actually winning office that the modest property holding requirement was increased more than ten-fold in 1699.³⁰ Cremin says that upon the first election of George Washington to the Presidency, only about fifteen percent of the free adult males in the nation could vote.³¹ Those who were eligible to vote were those who held the greatest wealth and thus were able to pay for the education of their children. We should see that there is no contradiction between the claim, so prevalent in early America, that education is necessary for the continuation of the republican government and the refusal to pay for a public system of free education. Those who might benefit from a system of public education could not vote and thus had little or no responsibility for running the government.

As the American nation grew, most of the newer states west of the Appalachians tried to make some provision for public education in their constitutions. They routinely instituted universal suffrage for adult males who were neither slaves nor Indians. The Indiana Constitution of 1816 stipulated that, when financial circumstances permitted, the state would

³⁰Marchette Chute, *The First Liberty: A History of the Right to Vote in America, 1619-1850* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969), 161.

³¹Cremin, *American Common School*, 2.

provide for a general system of free and public education. Provisions also were made for the creation of county libraries.³² Slowly, the western states took control of education away from religious sects by providing for free and public education.

The Ohio Constitution of 1803 demonstrates that its founders understood education to be important in a democratic society. Their understanding of what education was to provide shows their overwhelming concern for character education. The Ohio Constitution, echoing the Northwest Ordinance, states, "But religion, morality, and knowledge being essentially necessary to the good government and happiness of mankind, schools and the means of instruction shall forever be encouraged by legislative provision. . . ."³³ This constitution even goes so far as to state that the poor shall have "equal participation" in the educational system of the state.³⁴

It should not be surprising to find such a progressive attitude toward the provision of schooling in the western states. The western states were still frontiers, without established families. The framers of law were men who had left the east coast, the more established, even aristocratic, society of Boston and New York, for lands yet wild. Nonetheless, even as the western states of the early national era often proclaimed a more democratic and egalitarian agenda than did the eastern states, the west had few resources to make good those proclamations. The city of Cleveland, established in 1796,

³²Cubberley, *Readings in Public Education*, 112-3.

³³*Ibid.*, 111.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 111-2.

had no free public school until 1837.³⁵ The state of Pennsylvania, on the other hand, had mandated free public education on the elementary level by 1809.³⁶ New York City had its own free and public elementary school that same year.³⁷

Citizenship education advanced little in the first decades after the Revolution. Evidence of substantial instruction in American history is scant through the 1820s, and the evidence available places American history courses in the high schools, where few students had access. The New York Academies (roughly equivalent to high schools) were most often concerned with preparing young men for entry into the universities. The curricula of these academies up until 1827 consisted chiefly of Latin, Greek, and arithmetic,³⁸ it being assumed that passable skills in the English language had already been attained. Boston secondary schools had similar concerns, but taught a wider variety of courses. In 1823 the Boston secondary schools taught courses in the usual reading, writing, and arithmetic. They also taught geography, United States history, book keeping, higher mathematics, science, philosophy, and theology.³⁹ This inclusion of U.S. history is a clue to the growth of what in the twentieth century would be called civic education, or education for democratic citizenship. An examination of the curriculum at the public high school of Chicago in 1856 turns up no

³⁵Cubberley, *Readings in Public Education*, 122.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 173.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 132.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 221.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 233.

mention of either American history or the Constitution, but a course in "principles of government" is present.⁴⁰

Liberty has long been a central idea in American schoolbooks. In his account of nineteenth century schoolbooks, R. Freeman Butts says that of all the values put forth in these books, "liberty was pre-eminent. Whenever they attempted to explain why children should love their country above all else, the idea of liberty took first place."⁴¹ But this liberty was itself not carefully explained; schooling in liberty tended to be an affective rather than an intellectual education. Ruth Elson's study of nineteenth century American schoolbooks, *Guardians of Tradition*, says this with regard to the presentation of freedom in schoolbooks:

All books agree that the American nation politically expressed is the apostle of liberty, a liberty personified, apostrophized, sung to, set up in God-like glory, but rarely defined. To discover what liberty means in these books is a murky problem. The child reader could be certain that it was glorious, it is American, it is to be revered, and it deserves his primary loyalty. But for the child to find out from these books what this liberty is would be astonishing.⁴²

Though liberty was most definitely a subject for nineteenth century school children, it was a kind of liberty that some modern historians have called by another name. Elson condemns the textbook writers:

Although schoolbook authors consider themselves guardians of liberty, they can be more accurately described as guardians of tradition.

⁴⁰Cubberley, *Readings in Public Education*, 238.

⁴¹Butts, *The Revival of Civic Learning*, 58.

⁴²Ruth Elson, *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1964), 285.

. . . The nineteenth-century child was taught to worship past achievements of America and to believe in the inevitable spread of the American system throughout the world.⁴³

This claim that nineteenth century American public education was more concerned with the indoctrination of traditional values than with freedom is unfair. From within a critical awareness, situated at the end of the twentieth century, the nineteenth century textbooks may seem to have more concern with indoctrination than freedom. Nonetheless, most of the nineteenth century writers and thinkers on education overtly extol the ideas of freedom and republican government. The Reverend Jedidiah Morse in the preface to his popular schoolbook, *American Universal Geography*, first published in 1793, plainly states that all Americans must be educated in order to preserve the republican government.⁴⁴ And Noah Webster in the preface to his reader, the *Third Part*, says that he has included orations from the American founding fathers because they "contain such noble sentiments of liberty and patriotism that I cannot help wishing to transfuse them into the breasts of the rising generation."⁴⁵ Are we to believe these men hypocrites, with no real concern for freedom?

A better option is to realize how these early textbook writers conceptualized freedom. Few if any nineteenth century thinkers saw the need for more than a perfunctory level of education in order to safe-guard a freedom that they considered God-given. Nineteenth, like the eighteenth, century thinkers lived within a Lockean liberal understanding of the nature

⁴³Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 340.

⁴⁴Cubberley, *Readings in Public Education*, 276.

⁴⁵Webster, *An American Selection*, 1.

of freedom. Thus it was enough to teach a man to read, and to instill in him the Christian virtues of good character along with a rudimentary understanding of the workings of republican government. Even the radical thinker Thomas Jefferson believed that the mass of Americans could maintain their liberty with a free public education lasting only three years.⁴⁶

According to Elson, early American schoolbooks agreed that in order to be free "all men must have equal natural and civil rights."⁴⁷ Further, many schoolbooks included excerpts from the Declaration of Independence; of particular interest is the common inclusion of the sentence, "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain, inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."⁴⁸ We have already seen that the language of the Declaration was heavily influenced by Lockean liberal thought, especially with regard to the innateness of freedom and the limited role of government. Elson's contention that these thoughts are "revered but not examined"⁴⁹ seems unfair if we take seriously the contention of the Declaration that liberty is self-evidently the gift of God. What need have we to explain and examine that which is both self-evident and inalienable? The nineteenth century schoolbook writers were not ignorant, nor did they have an agenda of indoctrination; they understood freedom differently than do some modern Americans.

⁴⁶Thomas Jefferson, *Notes On Virginia in The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 243.

⁴⁷Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 289.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

Certainly, the schoolbooks of the early nineteenth century did engage in narrow nationalistic appeals to the emotions of readers. Elson provides many such examples.⁵⁰ However, to leave the analysis on this level, as if it explained all, reduces the textbook writers themselves to narrow and even hypocritical horde of petty patriots.

Webster's *Third Part*, of 1789, reproduces a patriotic speech given in 1772 by Dr. Joseph Warren. In this speech Warren stresses that the conflict with Great Britain is for the "preservation of your liberty."⁵¹ Also reproduced for young readers is "The First Petition of Congress to the King, in 1774." In this document we find the claim that it was by God that Americans "are born the heirs of freedom."⁵² Of course, Webster defined the words "free" and "freedom" in his *American Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1828. With reference to what is meant by being free, Webster understands that it is essentially a state in which one is not "under necessity or restraint, physical or moral;" when free one is not "in a state of vassalage or dependence."⁵³ This notion is very Lockean. The moral restraints of civil society must make one less free, according to Locke.⁵⁴

⁵⁰One early schoolbook's account of the American Revolutions says the following: "America was young, and, compared with other countries, was virtuous. None but a Herod of uncommon malice would have made war upon infancy and innocence." In Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 114.

⁵¹Webster, *An American Selection*, 128.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 131.

⁵³K. Alan Snyder, *Defining Noah Webster: Mind and Morals in the Early Republic* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1990), 353.

⁵⁴In the *Second Treatise* Locke explicitly says that in coming out of the state of nature (which is perfect freedom) into the state of society, every person in that society "puts himself under an Obligation to every one of that

Thus while Webster praises the liberty possible within a republican government, he stresses even more heavily the requirements of the proper constraint upon behavior within America. We find in Webster's schoolbooks a powerful combination of republicanism and moral restraint. Webster's understanding of freedom is, like that of his Puritan ancestors, well within the conditions of Lockean liberalism.

By far the most popular of the textbooks produced by Webster was his speller. By 1890 more than 60 million copies had been produced.⁵⁵ This text is replete with Christian moral preaching and tales. A quick examination of the contents of the 1831 edition of Webster's *American Spelling Book* discovers more than fifty moral lessons scattered throughout the text and (at the end of the text) a twelve page "moral catechism" teaching such lessons as humility, mercy, purity of heart, and economy. One historian of early schoolbooks says that Webster's spellers were "heavily laden with religious material . . . from the very beginning." And in summing up the themes that run through Webster's numerous schoolbook, the same historian says that these themes are the "diffusion of knowledge, principles of virtue, liberty, republican sentiments, and patriotism."⁵⁶

Webster's "readers" were uniquely influential in building an historical awareness in early Americans. The various versions of these readers routinely contained selections that presented the discovery and

Society, to submit to the determination of the majority. . . ." And if one did not so submit, "This would be still as great a liberty, as he himself had before his Compact, or any one else in the State of Nature hath, who may submit himself and consent to any acts of it if he thinks fit." Bk. II, § 97.

⁵⁵James Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), s.v. Webster, Noah.

⁵⁶Belok, *Forming the American Minds*, 104 and 114.

settlement of America, the Revolutionary War, Washington's addresses to his soldiers, the Declaration of Independence (in part or in whole), and Webster supplied his own essay: "Remarks on the Manners, Government, Laws, and Domestic Debt of America."⁵⁷ All of these lessons in Americanism were accompanied by a strict Christian moral authority that instructed children in their need to conform to the dictates of authority.

The other major schoolbook writer of the nineteenth century is William Holmes McGuffey. The various editions of McGuffey's *Eclectic Readers* were used from their first appearance in 1836 until the end of the century, and even beyond. These textbooks also concerned themselves largely with educating the character of the student. Altogether it is estimated that 122 million copies of the various editions were sold.⁵⁸ The McGuffey readers continued in the tradition, set by Webster, to mold the character of school children through the inculcation of Christian values.

A central value in the early schoolbooks is individualism. According to Cremin, economic and political individualism were an essential part of education. Cremin says that the early schoolbooks taught that "The laissez-faire economic system was so intimately related to the republican system that neither could well exist without the other."⁵⁹ The same values of hard work and individual responsibility that permeated the children's fiction of the time (e.g., the story of Miss Goody Two-Shoes in the late eighteenth century and the later Horatio Alger stories) permeate the textbooks used in schools. Cremin shows that schoolbooks stressed that "every man is the

⁵⁷Pangle and Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty*, 139.

⁵⁸Hart, *Concise Oxford Companion*, s.v. McGuffey, William Holmes.

⁵⁹Cremin, *American Common School*, 212.

maker of his own fortune, . . . all are dependent on the rigid maintenance of such principles as industry, economy, prudence, resoluteness, contentedness, and thankfulness." The schoolbooks are replete with examples of young boys who, through hard work, education, and good moral habits, find success.⁶⁰ We should recall that such lessons all function well within the Lockean liberal idea of the *tabula rasa* and a psychology of radical individualism.

Elson finds the same value of individual hard work in schoolbooks. Wealthy Americans are objects of respect in the schoolbooks; they are thought to have earned their wealth. These Americans of great means are routinely contrasted to the "idle rich" of Europe, who deserve no respect.⁶¹ Though the European aristocracy may combine idleness with wealth, in America idleness is taught to be the cause of poverty. Noah Webster's reader of 1835 says,

Hence the poor have no right to complain, if they do not succeed in business. They all enjoy the same rights; and if they continue in poverty, it is usually for want of industry, or judgment in the management of their affairs, or for want of prudence and economy in preserving what they earn. They have no more right to invade the property of the rich, than the rich have to invade the rights of the poor.⁶²

When the economic depression of 1837 hit, these sentiments must have been a painful lesson. Especially in the land of the free, children had to learn the necessity of moral restraint on actions.

⁶⁰Cremin, *American Common School*, 212.

⁶¹Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 265-6.

⁶²Noah Webster, *Instructive and Entertaining Lessons for Youth* (New Haven, Connecticut: S. Babcock and Durrie and Peck, 1835), 170; quoted in Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 280.

The adoption of Lockean liberal values is closely tied with the advance of the bourgeois class; thus it should not be surprising that nineteenth century schoolbooks exhibit these bourgeois values. Factory labor, as depicted in schoolbooks, seems a wonderful thing. The new machines are the miracles of American industrial genius. The work in the factories is healthy and pleasant. The factories all have libraries and lecture rooms for the workers to use after hours. Work in these factories is shown to be an great opportunity for the children of the poor. In the factories, with hard work and a proper attitude, one is freed to advance oneself out of poverty.⁶³ Thus character education has grown well beyond the early parameters of rustic Christianity. The values of individual responsibility, a "get ahead" attitude, and respect for bourgeois capitalism are taught as well.

Though early on there had been the realization by some leaders that education had to be given to all men, it was not until the Jacksonian age that this idea was largely accepted, though still not realized. We must remember that the Constitution of the United States did not stipulate the conditions of suffrage. Each state determined the qualifications of voters. Thus, there was suffrage for men of means only. And since men of means could afford their own education, there was really no need for universal education in citizenship. Education in character and basic literacy was enough; this kind of education was provided in the homes and churches. It was only as the new states west of the Appalachians were added to the country and granted universal male suffrage that the country began to recognize the importance of citizenship education for all men. The states of Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island did not

⁶³Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 247-8.

have universal free male suffrage until 1850 or later. Almost all of the new western states granted universal male suffrage upon entering into statehood. In fact, after 1817, every state that joined the union did so with the provision of universal suffrage for free men.⁶⁴ Thus the real reform of American education to universalize the formation of democratic (male) citizens did not begin until well into the nineteenth century. An example of this rising concern with citizenship education is a document produced during a teachers convention in Detroit in 1838. The document recognizes "The necessity of general education, as a safeguard of liberty, and as conducive especially to the stability of a republican form of government."⁶⁵

Also, formal education was largely an urban phenomena. The growth of cities was a new impetus for a more universal education. The provision of education to citizens dispersed across thousands of miles of frontier was not practical. Thus schools were heavily concentrated in cities. In 1820 there were only thirteen cities in America with 8,000 or more inhabitants; these cities comprised only five percent of the total population of the nation. After 1820 the total urban population increased rapidly. By 1860 there were 141 American cities with populations of 8,000 or more.⁶⁶ Thus widespread public education simply did not exist in America until after the expansion of male suffrage and the growth of cities.

School textbooks are not the only record of education in the first half of the nineteenth century. We can learn much from an examination of children's literature. The juvenile literature of the Jacksonian era played an

⁶⁴Cremin, *American Common School*, 3.

⁶⁵Cubberley, *Readings in Public Education*, 503.

⁶⁶Cubberley, *History of Education*, 667-70.

important role in character education. These texts for children routinely made statements like the following: "It is far better that [one] should know how to be kind and gentle to those around him than to understand all the poetry, or all the science that was ever written."⁶⁷ This moral instruction was a major part of children's education in homes, churches, and public schools. Education for freedom in the early nineteenth century consisted in the formation of good moral character as much as anything else.⁶⁸ And with good reason. The Jacksonian era was one of fundamental change, especially in its focus upon money. There was a sense that the increasing voice of the formerly disenfranchised and with the growing concern over wealth, many of the traditional values that had held the nation together were being broken down. The nation felt threatened. Children's literature at the time proposed that Americans deal with the new age by continuing to teach a traditional, Christian, moral rectitude.⁶⁹ Thus, already, education for freedom looked backward toward a past age for guidance rather than taking up the challenge of the radical changes and providing new solutions.

⁶⁷ "Attention," *The Juvenile Miscellany*, OS 1, no. 1 (1826), 81; quoted in Anne MacLeod, "Education for Freedom: Children's Fiction in Jacksonian America," *Harvard Educational Review* 46, no. 3 (August 1976): 427.

⁶⁸ MacLeod, "Education for Freedom," 427.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 435.

Education for Freedom in the Later Nineteenth Century

At the beginning of the Civil War, there were only two states that had not granted universal suffrage to all white men: Georgia and North Carolina. This would change by 1869. Then the enfranchisement of white American males was complete. There was now good reason to extend publicly financed education to all males. The same three aspects of education for freedom that dominated the first half of the century continued with very little change throughout the second half: character, literacy, and citizenship. With the advent of universal suffrage for white males, it should not be surprising that the most important change from the point of view of education for freedom concerns the proliferation of instruction in American history, geography, and government; this is citizenship education. It was only about 1850 that American history and geography became independent parts of the standard elementary school curriculum, having won a certain independence from the "readers" and "spellers" of the time. A quarter-century later, American geography and history (including education in the U.S. Constitution) were considered primary aspects of American elementary education and are widely represented in textbooks dedicated to these subjects.⁷⁰

Horace Mann proposed that substantial citizenship education be provided to children in public schools. Mann explained his idea for an education in civics in 1848. His idea was that schools should teach the formal structure of the national government. Mann proposed that the following ideas be taught:

⁷⁰Cubberley, *History of Education*, 756.

The partition of the powers of government into the three co-ordinate branches—legislative, judicial, and executive—with the duties appropriately devolving upon each; the mode of electing or of appointing all officers, with the reason on which it was founded; and, especially, the courts for redress, in all cases of alleged wrong, instead of undertaking to vindicate his own rights by his own are; and, in a government where the people are the acknowledged sources of power, the duty of changing laws and rulers by an appeal to the ballot, and not by rebellion, should be taught to all the children until they are fully understood.⁷¹

Many Americans feared that education in citizenship might actually be used to indoctrinate children into the narrow political beliefs of sectarian parties. Mann's solution to this problem, the teaching of the formal structure of government rather than party interpretations, became the standard in citizenship education. As Butts understands it, Mann's solution to the problem of political education avoids all controversial ideas and leaves out critical judgments.⁷² But, even so, Mann's solution to the problem was not immediately adopted.

According to Elson, the politics of schoolbooks did not change during the nineteenth century, nor was any other aspect of schoolbooks to change much. The first aim of nineteenth century schoolbooks was the development of character; intellect was secondary.⁷³ The form of these texts remained largely that of the catechism. The schoolbooks "offered both

⁷¹Horace Mann in Lawrence Cremin, ed. *The Republic and the School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1957), 93; quoted in R. Freeman Butts, *The Morality of Democratic Citizenship: Goals for Civic Education in the Republic's Third Century* (Calabasas, California: Center for Civic Education, 1988), 52-3.

⁷²Butts, *Revival of Civic Learning*, 61.

⁷³Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 1.

information and standards of behavior and belief that the adult world expected the child to make his own."⁷⁴

This reticence to change was exhibited too in the early national era. The schoolbooks of the 1830s, except for their new Americanism, were very little different from their colonial examples. The change made from British to American texts was accomplished shortly after the Revolution. Then, schoolbooks went largely unchanged for decades. One New England teacher describes, in 1830, the education he received around 1810. "The school books have been about the same for thirty years. Webster's *Spelling Book*, the *American Preceptor* [a reader], and the *New Testament*, have been the principal books used."⁷⁵ This teacher goes on to say that "until a few years ago, no studies have been permitted in the day school but spelling, reading, and writing."⁷⁶ Of course, these studies included Christian character formation and a substantial dose of republicanism through the use of the American readers and spellers.

In the second half of the nineteenth century there is a major change in the use of schoolbooks; there is an effort to have them standardized. In the early century, students routinely used whatever book was available to them. A survey of educational materials published by the *American Annals of Education* in 1832 says that the number of schoolbooks used had increased enormously. There were forty-five different spellers, more than one hundred readers, nearly fifty grammars, and ten dictionaries.⁷⁷ The

⁷⁴Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 10-11.

⁷⁵Cubberley, *Readings in Public Education*, 101.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 101-2.

⁷⁷Cremin, *American Common School*, 188-9n.

classroom was made difficult to monitor and control, in part, because of the large number of different schoolbooks being used. A state of Connecticut survey of schoolbook usage found that there were all of two hundred and fifty different books being used within Connecticut; this was the case despite there being officially designated texts.⁷⁸ Textbook publishers helped resolve the problem by keeping newer editions of their books in strict, page by page, accord with their older editions. The cost of books could thereby be kept down by allowing students to use the older editions. However, this practice made schoolbooks of the nineteenth century very slow to change. Elson says that "As a result of this effort at uniformity the textbooks were singularly resistant to change."⁷⁹

The centrality of the textbook in American education is often not fully appreciated. American schools relied more on textbooks than on teachers. Historians of education agree that the intellectual abilities of most early American school teachers were very low. Cubberley says that "Teachers in elementary schools everywhere in the eighteenth century were few in number, poor in quality, and occupied but a lowly position in the social scale."⁸⁰ Thus the schoolbook comes to play a particularly central role in American education. FitzGerald says that "In the nineteenth century, a heavy reliance on textbooks was the distinguishing mark of

⁷⁸Paul Monroe, *The Founding of the American Public School System*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 345-6; quoted in Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 9-10.

⁷⁹Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 10.

⁸⁰Cubberley, *History of Education*, 446.

American education; it was called 'the American system' by Europeans. The texts were substitutes for well-trained teachers. . . ."⁸¹

Few, if any, nineteenth century public school teachers had specific training in the teaching of history. American history was itself often lacking in public schools, while instruction in world, British, or European history was present. The study of history was not secure in America, even on the university level, until the end of the nineteenth century. The first chair in history at an American university was not created until 1839, at Harvard. Other institutions followed only slowly.⁸² Concentrated instruction in American history in the classrooms of the early national period was usually reserved to the end of the elementary school program; thus many students with only one or two years of schooling were not to benefit from this instruction. Throughout the nineteenth century there was a trend to include more instruction in American history and to make it present in all levels of schooling.⁸³ And though the purpose of teaching American history has included the cultivation of imagination, a love of truth, and providing students with a more "complete" life, one of the main reasons for instruction in American history has always been the inculcation of patriotism.⁸⁴

⁸¹Frances FitzGerald, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), 19.

⁸²Henry Bourne, *The Teaching of History and Civics in the Elementary and the Secondary School* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), 57.

⁸³Edgar Wesley, ed., *American History in Schools and Colleges* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 36.

⁸⁴Bourne, *Teaching of History and Civics*, 77-89.

But what was taught in these American history courses? Bourne noticed that by the late nineteenth century it was already routine to minimize the study of colonial America so as to focus more attention on "national history after 1783."⁸⁵ This is the date of the end of the Revolutionary War. Thus all of the material about the causes behind the Revolution, included in the schoolbooks of Noah Webster, was devalued. American history as taught in American schools was to be a truly national, rather than colonial, history.

The historian George Bancroft produced a multi-volume *History of the United States* that first appeared in 1834. For nearly fifty years Bancroft enlarged and re-edited this work. However, the introduction written for the original version remained unchanged in the edition of 1879. This introduction shows little concern with understanding the nature of freedom. Bancroft's introduction says this of America:

Prosperity follows the execution of even justice; invention is quickened by the freedom of competition; and labor rewarded with sure and unexampled returns. . . . Every man may enjoy the fruits of his industry; every mind is free to publish its convictions. Our government, by its organization, is necessarily identified with the interests of the people, and relies exclusively on their attachment for its durability and support. Even the enemies of the state, if there are any among us, have liberty to express their opinions undisturbed; and are safely tolerated, where reason is left free to combat their errors. . . . The principles of liberty, uniting all interests by the operation of equal laws, blend the discordant elements [of society] into harmonious union.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Bourne, *Teaching of History and Civics*, 295.

⁸⁶George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the Continent*, 6 vols., vol. 1 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1879), 1-3; quoted in R. Freeman Butts, *The Revival of Civic Learning*, 58.

With such panegyrics being written by professional historians, we can hardly fault the naive attitude toward freedom exhibited in schoolbooks and in the students who read them. Bancroft would have no reason to wonder at the nature of freedom if he knew that it was innate and a gift from the creator.

That freedom is not in need of development is another central teaching in the American schoolbooks. Elson claims that within these schoolbooks history tends to read like an "Hegelian process for the realization of the idea of freedom." World history is the stage for its development, and its final achievement is in the United States. Then, having been achieved with the American Revolution, freedom "becomes a relatively static thing. Liberty is what the Americans institutionalized during and just after the Revolution."⁸⁷ Again, this static quality makes perfect sense within a conception of freedom as innate. Within the Lockean liberal conception of freedom, the problem is not the development of freedom but the construction of a laissez-faire and minimal government; this minimal government then has the proper goal of the preservation of human kind's natural liberty. This theme of the maintenance of freedom resounds throughout nineteenth and twentieth century schoolbooks. A reader produced just after the Civil War states boldly that "The liberty of this country is a sacred depository—a vestal fire, which Providence has committed to us for the general benefit of mankind."⁸⁸ A modern historian, Gary Nash, claims that the schoolbooks teach a "sanitized"

⁸⁷Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 295-6.

⁸⁸Epes Sargent, *Standard Fourth Reader* (Boston: John L. Shorey, 1866), 259; quoted in Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 296. The exact same line is found in other schoolbooks; see Elson, *The Guardians of Tradition*, 296n.

American history and are, thereby, misleading, particularly with regard to freedom and democracy. "Almost all textbooks employ the great man theory of history to explain the advent, process, and outcome of the [American] Revolution."⁸⁹ It is this focus upon a few great men that reduces the great masses of men and women in revolutionary America to passive spectators who meekly received their government from wise leaders. Nash says that it is only when history is taught as a truly complex process that the true sense of democracy comes through. "A more realistic view of the American Revolution is more likely to inculcate a commitment to democratic principles. . . ."⁹⁰ Simplicity actually undermines democratic education by failing to provide the necessary sense of conflict. The Revolution is generally taught to school children as an inevitable product of America's leaders. Nothing of the contentiousness of the years of the Revolution is conveyed. Boyd Bode once joked that "To inherit the tradition of democracy . . . is not like inheriting the classical tradition; it is more like inheriting a lawsuit."⁹¹

The last decade of the nineteenth century was a time of re-evaluation for history education. The Committee of Ten of the National Education Association published a report on history education in 1893. This report encouraged greater reliance on primary sources and the teaching of critical thinking. Butts says that "For two or three decades the academic orientation

⁸⁹Gary Nash, "History for a Democratic Society: The Work of all the People," in Paul Gagnon, ed. *Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 244-5.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 247.

⁹¹George Counts, "Theses on Freedom in Relation to Culture, Social Planning, and Leadership" (Washington, D. C.: National Council of Education of the National Education Association, 1932), 21.

of the committee of Ten dominated curriculum thinking and curriculum making in the civic education programs of the secondary schools.⁹² However, the work of the Committee of Ten did not continue to influence history education. According to several scholars, the most influential statement on civic education in the twentieth century was to be the "Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education," published in 1918.⁹³ This report insisted that the aim of the social studies be good citizenship. The report said that in order to accomplish good citizenship, education in the following areas was vital:

Community health, housing and homes, public recreation, good roads, community education, poverty and the care of the poor, crime and reform, family income, savings banks and life insurance, human rights versus property rights, impulsive action of mobs, the selfish conservatism of tradition, and public utilities.⁹⁴

This form of citizenship education seems to have moved even farther away from the concern with freedom and to have taken up a more parochial task of accommodating youth to the society in which they found themselves. If the Committee of Ten succeeded in making the study of history more critical and acute, their success was short-lived. The "Cardinal Principles" shunted history study away from democratic criticism toward a more narrow concern for the socialization of youth.

⁹²Butts, *Revival of Civic Learning*, 63.

⁹³See Butts, *Revival of Civic Learning*, 64-66; also see Kenneth Jackson and Barbara Jackson, "Why the Time is Right to Reform the History Curriculum," in Paul Gagnon, ed. *Historical Literacy*, 4.

⁹⁴Butts, *Revival of Civic Learning*, 65

Education for Freedom in the Twentieth Century

Early nineteenth century education in civics typically consisted in little more than memorization of some parts of the Constitution or Declaration of Independence, coupled with character education.⁹⁵ By the early twentieth century there was some effort to move away from the teaching of facts and rote learning. It was recognized that learning the formal machinery of the American government alone was not productive of good citizens. Referring to civic education, Bourne in 1910 says that "The facts that are indispensable could be easily acquired; it is the intelligent honesty of purpose that one cannot impart to another in the course of an afternoon's talk."⁹⁶

Early in the twentieth century only a minority of Americans were able to take their education beyond elementary school. Thus it was recognized that if all male citizens were to obtain some instruction in civics, it must occur in the elementary schools.⁹⁷ It was thought important to teach civics only after a child had completed a course in American history, and American history was most usually taught in the fifth grade. Civic education could come only later. But, still, the level of intellectual development of these elementary school children was considered to be so low as to demand a less rigorous form of instruction. Consequently, civics education was to be carried on through the use of "simple stories, parable,

⁹⁵Bourne, *Teaching of History and Civics*, 93.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 99.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 367.

fables, treated with reference to idea of right and wrong."⁹⁸ Further, this education must concern itself with educating the character of the student: "Practical exercises tending to arouse the moral sense of the class" are to be used.⁹⁹ One Dean of a Normal School in 1911 says the following with regard to fifth grade instruction in the American Revolution: "Only a brief sketch of the causes and progress of the war should be attempted, most of the stress being given to the stories of adventure and heroism."¹⁰⁰

In the later elementary grades (seventh and eighth) a substantial instruction in American history was common in the early twentieth century. W. F. Bliss, dean at a state normal school, outlines the whole of his American history instruction. The Declaration of Independence is given much prominence. Included in his full-page analytical outline of the Declaration are the following main points:

- (a) All men are born free and equal.
- (b) Men's natural rights to life, liberty, and happiness.
- (c) The purpose of just governments to establish and secure these rights.
- (d) The just powers of government are derived from those governed.¹⁰¹

These statements well conform with the Lockean liberal notion of freedom. Parts (a) and (b) above are explicit statements of the innate nature of human freedom. Part (c) establishes the very limited role of government, that is to make "secure" our naturally existing rights and freedoms. Part (d)

⁹⁸Bourne, *Teaching of History and Civics*, 367.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰W. F. Bliss, *History in the Elementary Schools: Methods, Courses of Study, Bibliographies* (New York: American Book Co., 1911), 48.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 96.

takes up the issue of where rests sovereignty; clearly it rests with the people and not with government. Any education in American history that includes an examination of the Declaration must, to some degree, impart to students a Lockean liberal idea of freedom.

Public school instruction in civics often has not been particularly concerned with the ideas of freedom and political citizenship. Rather "citizenship" within the community and the family have long been stressed.¹⁰² Any sort of controversy has been assiduously avoided. Butts' own assessment of the history of civic education is that it has tended toward either of two extremes:

those motivated by a strong moral, national, or nativist fervor that gave civic education a tone of preachy or pugnacious patriotism; and those that would at all costs avoid political controversy in the schools, and thus turn civic education into pedantic, pallid, platitudinous, or pusillanimous exercises.¹⁰³

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that professional educators become the writers of textbooks. Elson claims that in the twentieth century we find textbooks moving away from overt character education and increasing concern with the education of the intellect.¹⁰⁴ This is a dubious claim. We must remember that textbooks are mass-marketed. Only texts aimed at capturing a very substantial portion of the market are produced. Thus, schoolbooks must have mass appeal. FitzGerald states that we must understand that the "truths" put forward in

¹⁰²Bliss, *History in the Elementary Schools*, 105.

¹⁰³Butts, *Revival of Civic Learning*, 53.

¹⁰⁴Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, 5.

textbooks are "a market commodity, determined by what will sell."¹⁰⁵

Summing up the state of modern American textbooks, Jerold Starr insists that "study after study confirms that history and social studies textbooks systematically ignore conflict in American life."¹⁰⁶

The single most used history schoolbook in America has been David Saville Muzzey's *American History*. First published in 1911, it remained the most used history text through the 1930s. And though still widely used through the 1940s and 1950s, it was no longer the most popular.¹⁰⁷ Muzzey's text absolutely fails to understand the economic and political problems of American history. For Muzzey, the solution for all problems lies with some obscure form of "moral regeneration," or character education.¹⁰⁸ Muzzey's focus upon individual American personalities like Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln provides further evidence for the prevalence of the great men notion of history. His avoidance of complex social and economic conditions may have allowed him to bring to history a more lively, but less profound, exposition. Certainly, Muzzey's history well fulfills the demands of the pedagogues of history of his time that fables and stories be used to teach the subject.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵FitzGerald, *America Revised*, 31.

¹⁰⁶Jerold Starr, "The Great Textbook War," in *Education and the American Dream: Conservatives, Liberals & Radicals Debate the Future of Education*, ed., Harvey Holtz (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1989), 106.

¹⁰⁷FitzGerald, *America Revised*, 59.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰⁹See Bourne, *Teaching of History and Civics*, 367.

A modern textbook historian, writing about the history textbooks she studied in school in the 1950s, says,

Ideologically speaking, the histories of the fifties were implacable, seamless. Inside their covers, America was perfect: the greatest nation in the world, and the embodiment of democracy, freedom, and technological progress. For them, the country never changed in any important way: its values and its political institutions remained constant from the time of the American Revolution.¹¹⁰

Even as late as the 1990s we find critics still condemning textbooks. "Today's textbooks are written by committees and designed to be simplistic and to offend no one, making them incredibly dull."¹¹¹ Thus we have little reason to suspect that anything but the traditional (i.e., Lockean liberal) understanding of freedom could be present in American schoolbooks.

Even R. Freeman Butts, long an important and progressive spokesman for freedom and civic education, operates within the confines of the Lockean liberal tradition. Butts claims that without some limitation upon freedom, there is the danger that freedom become "anarchy, license, and unbridled libertarian individualism."¹¹² In order to avoid such a development, Butts puts forth the theory of John Rawls. We have already seen that Rawls works within Lockean liberalism; though in his more recent work, in particular *Political Liberalism* (1993), he begins to develop a more social notion of freedom. Butts explains that "The first principle of

¹¹⁰FitzGerald, *America Revised*, 10.

¹¹¹David Elliott, "Textbooks and the Curriculum in the Postwar Era: 1950-1980," in *Textbooks and Schooling in the United States: Eighty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, ed. David Elliott and Arthur Woodward (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, 1990), 51.

¹¹²Butts, *Morality of Democratic Citizenship*, 144.

freedom, according to Rawls, requires that each person is to have an equal right to basic liberties but only so far as compatible with a similar system of equal basic liberties for all."¹¹³ That is, liberty must be limited for society to exist. Implicit in Rawls' statement is the assumption that the basic liberties of one person conflict with the same liberties of other persons. This conflict is to be resolved by placing limitation upon the rights/liberties of all members of a society. This is Locke's claim that upon entering into a social situation, one is necessarily less free than one had been while in the state of nature.

Butts' understanding of the American Revolution is permeated with Lockean liberalism. What Butts finds crucial to the American solution to the problem of legitimizing government is the movement away from traditional aristocratic bodies toward the sovereign individual. This group of sovereign individuals who constituted the new society would establish their government upon the base of their own "natural rights of liberty and equality."¹¹⁴ Thus Butts presumes a natural liberty that pre-exists any social organization and that grounds that social organization; this belief in an innate freedom is a central aspect of Lockean liberalism.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) made substantial studies of citizenship education in America. Several widely accepted recommendations concerning citizenship education in American schools came from this group. In 1980 the NCSS published its *Essentials of the Social Studies* as a set of recommendations for public school education in the social studies. In a section titled "Democratic Beliefs" the report says,

¹¹³Butts, *Morality of Democratic Citizenship*, 144

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

"Fundamental beliefs drawn from the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution with its Bill of Rights form the basic principles of our democratic constitutional order."¹¹⁵ Again we see the use of the Declaration (the paradigmatic statement of Lockean liberalism) as a prime document for the education of youth. Too often the study of American history and civics is limited to inculcating some too limited notion of democratic character.¹¹⁶

Character education as a form of education for freedom in American pedagogy continues. James Mursell's *The Principles of Democratic Education*, 1955, claims that "Character is the supreme goal of democratic education."¹¹⁷ Mosher, Kenny, and Garrod, 1994, claim that the teaching of democratic values is an integral part of democratic education. That is, they claim that democratic education must be concerned with the development of a moral character that is amenable to living within a democratic community.¹¹⁸ Character education can occur on a simplistic level of obedience, or it may take into account the much broader requirements of true democratic participation.

Of course, some careful thinkers have rejected the Lockean liberal understanding of freedom. A counter-tradition exists, though it is a

¹¹⁵*Essentials of the Social Studies* (Washington, D. C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1980), n.p.; quoted in Butts, *The Morality of Democratic Citizenship*, 14.

¹¹⁶FitzGerald, *America Revised*, 218.

¹¹⁷Mursell, *Principles of Democratic Education*, 43. Emphasis is Mursell's.

¹¹⁸Ralph Mosher, Robert Kenny, and Andrew Garrod, *Preparing for Democratic Citizenship: Teaching Youth to Live Democratically* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1994) 50.

minority position that has little influence on classroom instruction. George Counts, in the early 1930s, knew quite well that freedom could not be innate. At a meeting of the National Council of Education, Counts says that,

Freedom is a product of cooperative endeavor rather than a condition to be maintained or recovered. The savage is perhaps the least free of men. Freedom, individual freedom, is primarily a positive *social* achievement rather than a throwing off of restraints.¹¹⁹

As we shall see, there is a counter-tradition to the Lockean liberal idea of freedom. George Counts was not the first to claim that something was deeply wrong with the way Americans understood their freedom. There is a long and distinguished history of thinkers who opposed the Lockean liberal notion. We must begin to examine that history.

¹¹⁹Counts, "Theses on Freedom," 4.

CHAPTER FIVE
EMERSONIAN FREEDOM OF AND THE REJECTION OF LOCKE

When we know not how to steer, and dare not hoist a sail, we can drift. The current knows the way, though we do not. When the stars and sun appear, when we have conversed with navigators who know the coast, we may begin to put out an oar and trim a sail. The ship of heaven guides itself, and will not accept a wooden rudder.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals*

It is all too easy to see Emerson as the toady of bourgeois interests. The Emerson who espouses individual freedom and celebrates business all too often overshadows the Emerson who, deeply steeped in Christian, Moslem, and Hindu theology, spoke of the over-soul, of genius, and of nature. Though many of Emerson's contemporaries held his ideas suspect, especially his peculiar understanding of Christianity,¹ modern scholars are more likely to view him as the spokesman, par excellence, for bourgeois freedom and for the capitalist values of hard work and self-reliance.² One contemporary Emerson scholar even goes so far as to hold Emerson

¹Andrews Norton, "The New School in Literature and Religion," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 27, 1832, p. 2; reprinted in Robert Burkholder and Joel Myerson, eds., *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983), 31-4.

²For example see Perry Miller, "Emersonian Genius and American Democracy," *New England Quarterly* 26 (March 1953); reprinted in *Critical Essays on Emerson*, ed., Burkholder and Myerson, 276-288.

responsible for the "corporate individualism" that simultaneously "rejects private and public control [of state and community]."³ Nonetheless, there is something much deeper and more critical of the American status quo to be found in Emerson, even if it is not always appreciated.

George Santayana was fully aware of Emerson's radical philosophy and of the centrality of freedom within that philosophy. Santayana says of Emerson,

Freedom, in its various expressions, was his profoundest ideal, and if there was anything which he valued more than the power to push on to what might lie before, it was the power to escape what lay behind. A sense of potentiality and a sense of riddance are, as he might have said, the two poles of liberty. In America both poles are highly magnetic, for here more than elsewhere, old things had been thrown off and new things were to be expected. Potentiality, cosmic liberty, nature perpetually transforming and recovering her energy, formed his loftiest theme; but the sense of riddance in escaping kings, churches, cities, and eventually self and even humanity, was the nearer and if possible the livelier emotion.⁴

While some critics of Emerson insist that he soon turned his back on Transcendentalism, the more perceptive critics argue that it is precisely his Transcendentalism that most adequately accounts for the whole of Emerson's life and works. Perry Miller takes the first position.

I believe that students of Emerson get nowhere unless they realize how often Emerson wished that the cup of Transcendentalism had not been pressed to his lips. Had he been spared that, he might comfortably have regarded the Democratic party as a rabble of Irish

³Christopher Newfield, *The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 4-5.

⁴George Santayana, "Emerson's Poems Proclaim the Divinity of Nature, With Freedom as His Profoundest Ideal," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 23 May 1903, 16.

and other unwashed immigrants, and could have refused, as for long he did refuse, to find any special virtue in democracy as a slogan.⁵

Santayana, certainly a more perceptive critic than Miller, says that

In Emerson what lay behind the naturalist was in measure a political thinker, a moralist interested in institutions and manners, a democrat and a Puritan; but chiefly what lay there was a mystic, a moralist athirst for some superhuman and absolute good.⁶

What Santayana found at the core of Emerson was, indeed, Transcendentalism. This chapter will proceed in line with Santayana's opinion: that Transcendentalism is the key to understanding Emerson. Those aspects of Emerson's thought most central to this chapter will be his understanding of transcendent law, his notion of freedom, and the relation of these two to the problem of education for freedom.

Locke and the Unitarian Environment of Emerson

If we are to examine Emerson's understanding of freedom, as well as that of his most notable disciple, Thoreau, we must first of all understand something of the environment in which Emerson developed his ideas. The New England Unitarianism in the 1820s, in which Emerson developed, had been strongly influenced by Enlightenment thought, especially that of Locke. "Essentially, Boston Unitarianism represents the marriage of New England Puritanism and the Enlightenment—the farthest, perhaps, that the Puritan mind could go to meet the Age of Reason without, like Franklin,

⁵Miller, "Emersonian Genius," 278.

⁶Santayana, "Emerson's Poems Proclaim."

leaving its Puritanism behind altogether."⁷ This participation in the Enlightenment is particularly evident in the Unitarian faith in reason. Just as Locke had insisted 130 years earlier, the Unitarians insisted that Christianity was essentially a rational religion. Though the Unitarians continued to accept scriptural revelation as a legitimate source of spiritual authority, they, like Locke, insisted that even scripture had to work within the limits of reason. The core of Unitarian faith insisted that scripture be amenable to interpretation by the use of reason and that true scripture could contain nothing inconsistent with the laws of nature and of reason.⁸ Stephen Whicher explains the grounds of Unitarian faith as three-fold: "revelation, the formal ground; reason, the theoretical test of revelation; and moral sense, the actual test of reason."⁹

Emerson turned away from Unitarian belief and its Lockean influence when he realized that the first two of the three grounds of the faith could not, ultimately, be upheld. Both revelation and reason lost authority with Emerson. Thus all that remained as the basis of religion was the individual moral sense. Reason had undermined much of scriptural revelation, especially miracles, and Emerson found himself unequal to the demands of reason. In his early journals Emerson confessed that he could not understand the laws of reason: "Whether any laws fix them, and what

⁷Stephen Whicher, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1953), 7.

⁸Ibid. Also, compare John Locke, *Two Treatises*, bk. I, § 58 and 86.

⁹Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 7.

the laws are, I cannot ascertain."¹⁰ Thus Emerson moved away from the Unitarian and rational beliefs of his neighbors toward a more internal source of faith.

As a young minister, six years prior to the publication of his first book, *Nature* (1836), Emerson could praise reason from the pulpit. In a sermon given in 1830 Emerson said, "Is not one God the author of reason & of revelation? The best the indispensable evidence of revelation is its entire agreement with reason."¹¹ Locke himself could not have stated the case for reason more strongly. Yet, again, Emerson's journals show his dissatisfaction with a religion based on reason. Emerson confessed to himself that,

My reasoning faculty is proportionately weak, nor can I ever hope to write a Butler's Analogy or an essay of Hume. Nor is it strange that with this confession I should choose theology, which is from everlasting to everlasting "debateable Ground." For, the highest species of reasoning upon divine subjects is rather the fruit of a sort of moral imagination, than of "Reasoning Machines" such as Locke & Clarke & David Hume.¹²

Emerson saw the possibility of a kind of "highest species of reasoning," more powerful than the reason of Locke and of Enlightenment philosophy.

¹⁰Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. I, ed. Edward Emerson and Waldo Forbes (Boston: n. p., 1909), 284; quoted in Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 8.

¹¹Emerson, ["Reason and Revelation"], manuscript sermon BMS AM 1280.215 (92), Houghton Library, Harvard University; quoted in David Robinson, "Emerson's Natural Theology and the Paris Naturalists: Toward a Theory of Animated Nature," in Burkholder and Myerson, ed., *Critical Essays on Emerson*, 502-3.

¹²Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. II, ed. William Gillman (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1960-), 238; quoted in David Robinson, "Emerson's Natural Theology," in Burkholder and Myerson, ed., *Critical Essays*, 503.

Emerson's Transcendentalism was, in part, a reaction against Locke and eighteenth century rationalism. This higher reasoning evinced itself in the moral sentiment of all human beings, according to Emerson.¹³ And since this moral sentiment was universal and infallible, salvation was available to all. Whicher explains that

It dawned on Emerson, to his joy and amazement, that the perfection which Adam was supposed to have destroyed for all but the few to whom God in his mercy elected to restore it, had never been lost at all. The Fall of Man was a myth. In some men, at some times, God is agent, in the rest latent, but for all "the whole is now potentially in the bottom of his heart."¹⁴

Emerson's "highest reason," what he came to call "Reason" as distinct from "reason," became his source of faith, the sole ground and arbiter of belief. The use of the capital "R" is important. Joel Porte says that Emerson, having relegated the traditional, formulaic, and Lockean forms of rational thought to "reason," eagerly took to Coleridge's definition of Reason as set forth in *Aids to Reflection*. Coleridge therein says "Reason is the Power of universal and necessary conviction, the Source and Substance of Truths above sense, and having their evidence in themselves."¹⁵ What this

¹³Emerson shared this belief with his contemporaries the Quakers; see Maurice Gonnaud, *Individu et Société dans L'Œuvre de Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essai de Biographie Spirituelle* (Paris: Didier, 1964), 185. We may also note with interest that in 1827 a Pennsylvania Quaker, Elias Hicks, was espousing the radical idea of the internality of the divine; See James Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), s.v. Quakers.

¹⁴Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 23. Internal quotation is from the *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. III, ed. Emerson and Forbes, 209.

¹⁵Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (Burlington: n.p., 1829), 137; quoted in Joel Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University, 1966), 85.

Reason dictated, Emerson obeyed. Obedience to this inner voice, to the voice of God within, sanctioned Emerson's new line of radical thought that developed under the name of Transcendentalism.

The sources of Transcendentalism are as diverse as those of any literary or philosophical movement that ever existed. They include the German Idealists Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Herder; the German authors Goethe and Novalis; the British writers Coleridge, Carlyle, and Wordsworth; with additional influences coming from Platonism, Confucius, the Moslem Sufis, Buddhists, Hindus, Thomas à Kempis, and Swedenborg.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the core belief of Transcendentalism is simple: the immanence of God in all things. Whicher says of Emerson that "The rock on which he thereafter based his life was the knowledge that the soul of man does not merely . . . contain a spark or drop or breath or voice of God; it is God."¹⁷ Francis Bowen, a contemporary critic of Emerson and professor of religion and philosophy at Harvard, harshly assessed the movement called Transcendentalism in his review (published in 1837) of Emerson's *Nature*. Bowen says,

The aim of the Transcendentalists is high. They profess to look not only beyond the facts, but without the aid of facts, to principles. What is this but Plato's doctrine of innate, eternal, and immutable ideas, on the consideration of which all science is founded? . . . Again, they are busy in the inquiry (to adopt their own phraseology), after the Real and the Absolute, as distinguished from the Apparent.¹⁸

¹⁶Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion*, s.v. Transcendentalism.

¹⁷Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 21.

¹⁸Francis Bowen, "Emerson's *Nature*" in *The Recognition of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Criticism Since 1837*, ed. Milton Konvitz (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1972), 4.

Bowen misunderstands Emerson's methods and goals;

Transcendentalism is not re-heated Platonic idealism. Certainly, it is a reaction against the Enlightenment philosophy that made reason the sole arbiter of genuine faith. There is good reason to believe that the prime influence over Emerson's thought was not a philosophy at all but the writer Coleridge. And regardless of the work of Platonists, German Idealists, and Oriental theology, Emerson's work is original rather than derivative. There is little basis on which to believe that in 1836 Emerson had anything but a passing knowledge of Plato, Kant, and Hinduism.¹⁹ There is every reason to believe that it was only after the writing of *Nature* that Emerson began to discover the wealth of Idealist philosophy and theology that already existed.

Emerson's Transcendent Law

Perhaps the most misunderstood part of Emerson's thought is his relationship to the transcendent law. Francis Bowen's review of *Nature* condemns the work as arrogant. *Nature* might be seen as arrogant because of the absolute certainty that Emerson exhibits in the knowledge of transcendent law that he obtains from his moral sense. Bowen contends that *Nature* "gives a dictatorial tone to the expression of opinions, and a harsh, imperious, and sometimes flippant manner to argumentative discussion. . . ." Bowen goes on to say that Emerson's philosophy "is abstruse in its dogmas, fantastic in its dress, and foreign in its origin. It

¹⁹Whicher insists that although much of Emerson's thought could have been derived from the work of others, because of his ignorance of these sources Emerson's Transcendentalism was his own creation. See Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 30-1 and 180-1.

comes from Germany, and is one of the first fruits of a diseased admiration of every thing from that source. . . ."20

A more modern, and perhaps even harsher, criticism of Emerson also is based in a misunderstanding of Emerson's "moral sense" and its relation to the "transcendent law." Christopher Newfield of the University of California traces America's radical individualism and willing submission to authority to Emerson, in particular to Emerson's strict obedience to the transcendent law. Newfield says that Emerson's concept of individualism is so tied to submission to the transcendent law that rebellion is reduced to obedience. Newfield says that as we moderns read Emerson, we come to see our own obedience to the laws of culture and society as identical with our individuality. As far as it goes, this is a correct understanding of Emerson. However, Newfield's reading of Emerson fails to understand the nature of the transcendent law that requires absolute obedience.

Newfield says that "The major American tradition of moderation rests less on the much-discussed balance between individual autonomy and popular sovereignty than on the habit of submission to authority that weakens autonomy and democracy alike." And Newfield claims that the author of this American submissiveness is Emerson.²¹ Newfield recognizes that his account of Emerson runs counter to the traditional interpretation. He says,

Emerson is most often read as a laissez-faire individualist, and radical individualism is usually thought to be his distinctive contribution to American culture. He is most famous for rejecting the authority of

²⁰Bowen, "Emerson's Nature," in Konvitz, ed., *The Recognition*, 5.

²¹Newfield, *The Emerson Effect*, 1.

"society" or "custom" and chronicling the superior merits of self-reliance.²²

However, Newfield argues that it is the supreme or Transcendent law, which is known with certainty through the moral sense, that obviates both the individual and the society. Newfield understands that "Emerson links self-possession to submission to an absolute": this absolute is the transcendent law.²³ In submission to this law, we find freedom and our genius. Newfield explains that,

Superiority forms the context of transcendent law; accepting an external superiority is what makes "great men" great. Emerson imagines not those contemporaries who are extraordinary for their independence, originality, or freedom, but those who submit like children to the highest authority.²⁴

Thus, in the end, Newfield asserts that "Emerson's double legacy, then is this: freedom means endless flexibility, and freedom means loss of control."²⁵ Control must be given over to the transcendent law in order to attain freedom. Newfield goes on to explain that today it is the omnipresent law of the market-place, the law of bourgeois capitalism, that functions as this supreme and transcendent law that compels the obedience of all. The market is the law that allows for freedom only when we act within its unquestioned operations. Newfield says that,

Most of the time, Emerson sanctions that process by which individualism comes to accept the market as friend rather than enemy and becomes submissive in the process. He encourages the

²²Newfield, *The Emerson Effect*, 6.

²³*Ibid.*, 24.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 26.

movement . . . in which a self-controlled group abandons control to higher powers.²⁶

That Emerson could be seen as responsible for American submission to market forces is a curious argument that can gain support only when Emerson's notion of the transcendent law is sorely misunderstood. There can be no question that Emerson understands that freedom is possible only through the submission of the self to the transcendent law. But this law is not the law of the capitalist market.

Emerson seems to contradict himself constantly, and Newfield's reading of Emerson is not without textual support. In "Self-Reliance" Emerson says, "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events."²⁷ Yet, in his essay "The Over-Soul," Emerson seems to deprecate the notion of self-trust. He says, "The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims in some one particular to let the soul have its way through us; in other words, to engage us to obey."²⁸ One could try to find some authoritarian ideal in these words, as Newfield does. Or one might try the more profitable path and come to reconcile these seeming

²⁶Newfield, *The Emerson Effect*, 172.

²⁷Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 133.

²⁸Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1950), 238.

contradictions by understanding something of Emerson's transcendent law, the obedience to which is freedom.

What does Emerson mean when he writes of the transcendent law? Morality is for Emerson the highest and most inclusive law, thus the moral law is Emerson's transcendent law that demands obedience.²⁹ Joel Porte says about Emerson's understanding of this law that

It is important . . . to note that in Emersonian terms the moral sentiment, moral law, and moral sense are equivalent to the revelations of the Over-Soul, to duty, and to the law of the world. Man, in his best moments, finds himself at one with the universe, and the great revelation which rises spontaneously in his soul proves to be quite simply the difference between right and wrong.³⁰

In his journal Emerson writes, "The moral sentiment . . . is absolute and in every individual the law of the world."³¹

Various laws may be written down. But in so doing the law is fixed and dead. For Emerson the true moral law is written only upon the heart. One of Emerson's most important sermons was written to convey this point. Citing the Bible (II Corinthians 3:3), Emerson says the epistle of Christ is "written not in ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in fleshly tablets of the heart."³²

²⁹Henry David Gray, *Emerson: A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of Its Chief Exponent* (New York: Frederick Ungar, n.d.), 71.

³⁰Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau*, 74.

³¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, vol. X (Boston: n.p., 1914), 193; quoted in Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau*, 74.

³²Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. I, ed. Albert J. Von Frank (New York: Columbia University,

Not finding the transcendent law in books, we must look within. The tool we use to find this transcendent law is "Reason," not reason. Reason does not provide a relativist or perspectival understanding. Rather, Emerson understands that through Reason one comes to the eternal truth that is the transcendent law. Hallengren makes the point that, at least with regard to morality, Emerson is no subjectivist. Much of Emerson's life was concerned with the search for a lasting and universal truth.³³ Joel Porte makes essentially the same claim. "Emerson is much closer to being an absolutist in morals. The trouble is that Emerson often *seems* to be a relativist without actually being one."³⁴

Ubiquity of the Transcendent Law

We must understand that Emerson has a rather precise understanding of the nature of the transcendent, moral, law that he obeys. People do not create this law; it both precedes and is superior to the individual. And though many modern economists do speak of the "law of the market" as if it were eternal, transcendent, and demanding of obedience, there can be no legitimate support for thinking that this market law is the transcendent law to which Emerson refers.

1989); quoted in Anders Hallengren, *The Code of Concord: Emerson's Search for Universal Laws*, Stockholm Studies in History of Literature, no. 34 (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994), 225.

³³Hallengren, *The Code of Concord*, 32.

³⁴Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau*, 77.

Emerson had his ecstatic moments. In *Nature* he says,

Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.³⁵

That a man open to such experiences would elevate the law of the market to the level of a supreme and transcendent law is absurd.

Emerson understood that commercial relations partake of the transcendent law without being that law. In reading the chapter on "Wealth" in *Conduct of Life*, one could suspect that Emerson did play the part of toady to bourgeois interests, but only if one did not read carefully. Emerson, always the preacher looking for converts, uses the analogy of business to address a nation whose main interests were business. This should not surprise us. Why did Jesus use the analogies of the vine, the fruit, and the lost sheep? These were analogies his agrarian and pastoral audience understood. Emerson was no fool. In bustling Boston of the mid-nineteenth century one might look very far before finding simple farmers. Business is Emerson's analogy of choice. The supreme law is, of necessity, reflected in all of nature, and thus in all human activities as well—even business.

"The laws of nature play through trade, as a toy-battery exhibits the effect of electricity."³⁶ This is Emerson's own account of the relation of business to the transcendent law. To mistake the laws of business for the transcendent law itself is a grave error. Still, one can come to understand something of this law through observation of the world. And Emerson's

³⁵Emerson, *Nature*, in *Selected Writings*, 6.

³⁶Emerson, *The Conduct of Life*, in *Selected Writings*, 632.

audience knew little else better than it knew business. In a particularly homey analogy Emerson said,

The sublime laws play indifferently through atoms and galaxies. Whoever knows what happens in the getting and spending of a loaf of bread and a pint of beer, that no wishing will change the rigorous limits of pints and penny loaves; that for all that is consumed so much less remains in the basket and pot, but what is gone out of these is not wasted, but well spent, if it nourish his body and enable him to finish his task—knows all of political economy that the budgets of empires can teach him. The interest of petty economy is this symbolization of the great economy; the way in which a house and a private man's methods tally with the solar system and the laws of give and take, throughout nature. . . .³⁷

This is not a man who worships business, but a man who sees beneath even the petty exchanges of everyday life the work of a transcendent law.

As Emerson says, the eternal law works throughout the universe: "through atoms and galaxies." There is no place where this law does not function. But to mistake the particular manifestations of the law for the law itself is (as Zen masters have long said) to mistake the pointing finger for the moon. Emerson understands how every aspect of life points beyond itself to a supreme law that orders it; he never mistakes the particular manifestation of the law for the law itself.

In his "Address" before the Harvard Divinity School, Emerson connected his moral sense with the supreme law. He said, "The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstances."³⁸ We neither create nor control these laws; they are transcendent in the fullest sense of the word. Thus we should expect to

³⁷Emerson, *The Conduct of Life*, in *Selected Writings*, 632.

³⁸Emerson, "Address," in *Selected Writings*, 64.

find them everywhere we care to look, and Emerson did. The tool given to discover this law is the moral sentiment that operates in accord with Reason. Emerson said of that sentiment that

It perceives that this homely game of life we play, covers, under what seem foolish details, principles that astonish. The child amidst his baubles is learning the action of light, motion, gravity, muscular force; and in the game of human life, love, fear, justice, appetite, man and God, interact.³⁹

Emerson knows that the transcendent laws "will not be written out on paper, or spoken by the tongue. They elude our persevering thought; yet we read them hourly in each other's faces, in each other's actions. . . ."⁴⁰ Notice that the transcendent law is not to be found in "thought;" rather, it is available to us in the faces and actions of those around us. Those who search for this law with only the rational mind will not find it. The law will, however, show itself plainly to those who are willing to let it show itself in the face of a friend or lover. It was of the transcendent law that Emerson sang when he wrote in his "Ode,"

Let man serve law for man;
Live for friendship, live for love,
For truth's and harmony's behoof
. . . .⁴¹

³⁹Emerson, "Address," in *Selected Writings*, 64.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹Emerson, "Ode," in *Selected Writings*, 695.

Emersonian Freedom and the Transcendent Law

Obedience to the supreme law is the way of freedom, according to Emerson. Any attempt to resist the transcendent law is, ultimately, self destructive. Emerson understands the world as the product of a single will, of a single mind. "And that one mind is everywhere active, in each ray of the star, in each wavelet of the pool; and whatever opposes that will is everywhere balked and baffled, because things are made so, and not otherwise."⁴² Freedom always requires doing that which is good, that which is in accord with this single mind, and that which is consistent with the transcendent law of the world. Emerson observes that

Whilst a man seeks good ends, he is strong by the whole strength of nature. In so far as he roves from these ends, he bereaves himself of power, or auxiliaries; his being shrinks out of all remote channels, he becomes less and less, a mote, a point, until absolute badness is absolute death.⁴³

Some might deny that this is freedom. One might contend that we must be free to do evil as well as good if we are to be free at all. Not so, says Emerson. Only the good is real in Emerson's ontology. "Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death or nonentity."⁴⁴ Freedom consists in acting in accordance with the transcendent law, of placing oneself into the well-springs of nature whose power carries us along in the doing of all good things. The powers of nature add to our own when we act in accord with them. These laws do

⁴²Emerson, "Address," in *Selected Writings*, 65.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

demand submission and obedience, but in this submission Emerson sees not the loss of freedom but, rather, the only path to true freedom.

Mark Twain taught that Huck and Jim were free when they submitted themselves to the flow of the Mississippi; their freedom consisted, in part, in allowing themselves to be carried along by a power transcendent of their own. Emerson has his own river image. In his poem, "The Adirondacs," Emerson writes of his band of men in boats rowing into the wilderness and into freedom.

Northward the length of Follansbee we rowed,
Under low mountains, whose unbroken ridge
Ponderous with beechen forest sloped the shore.

.....
We were made freemen of the forest laws,
All dressed, like Nature, fit for her own ends,
Adirondac lakes,
Essaying nothing she cannot perform.⁴⁵

On the river Emerson realizes that the knowledge of the gentleman counts for little; nature imposes her own laws upon the men.

In sooth, red flannel is a saucy test
Which few can put on with impunity.
What make you, master, fumbling at the oar?
Will you catch crabs? Truth tries pretension here.
The sallow knows the basket-maker's thumb;
The oar, the guide's. Dare you accept the tasks
He shall impose, to find a spring, trap foxes,
Tell the sun's time, determine the true north,
Or stumbling on through vast self-similar woods
To thread by night the nearest way to camp?⁴⁶

⁴⁵Emerson, "The Adirondacs," in *Selected Writings*, 723-4.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 725.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these demands that nature forces upon those who would travel in her realm, Emerson finds his own soul.

And presently the sky is changed; O world!
What pictures and what harmonies are thine!
The clouds are rich and dark, the air serene,
So like the soul of me, what if 't were me?

.....
Daily the bending skies solicit man,
The seasons chariot him from this exile,
The rainbow hours bedeck his glowing chair,
The storm-winds urge the heavy weeks along,
Suns haste to set, that so remoter lights
Beckon the wanderer to his vaster home.⁴⁷

Emerson's understanding of freedom is not strange to anyone knowledgeable about eastern religion; Taoists and Buddhists are at home in this aspect, at least, of Emerson's thought. Emerson's transcendent law is the absolute source of all things. It is Lao-Tzu's Tao: it is that from which nothing can come unless it is obeyed. Huston Smith, the noted scholar of religious history, says about the Tao that only while working within it is one free. Work within the Tao "is the embodiment of suppleness, simplicity, and freedom—a kind of pure effectiveness in which no motion is wasted . . ."⁴⁸ The noted twentieth-century authority on Zen Buddhism, Daisetz Suzuki, explains how we come to know the transcendent law: "The Dharma [cosmic law] was to be intuited and not to be analytically reached by concepts."⁴⁹ Emerson had little knowledge of oriental theology and

⁴⁷Emerson, "The Adirondacs," in *Selected Writings*, 728.

⁴⁸Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 208.

⁴⁹Daisetz Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism, First Series* (London: Rider & Company, 1949); reprint, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1961), 61.

philosophy early in his life. However, he maintained a life-long interest in the subject, and a look at his library at the time of his death shows a substantial collection of oriental works. Though works on Buddhism are few, his library contained many volumes about and by Hindu and Islamic theologians.⁵⁰

In brief, Emerson equates freedom with the putting aside of self, identification with the Over-Soul, and submission to the constraints of the transcendent law. Emerson identifies this law with fate—and he expounds greatly upon this theme in his essay “Fate.” He castigates those who claim freedom but understand nothing of it.

Nothing is more disgusting than the crowing about liberty by slaves, as most men are, and the flippant mistaking for freedom of some paper preamble like a Declaration of Independence or the statute right to vote, by those who have never dared to think or to act. . . .⁵¹

Emerson is much concerned with the relation people have to fate because of the relation of freedom to fate. The way of the “weak and lazy” is to succumb to fate and to blame their troubles on it. But, “the right use of Fate is to bring up our conduct to the loftiness of nature.” That is, to act with the same power and inevitability as nature. “For if Fate is so prevailing, man also is part of it, and can meet fate with fate. . . . If there be omnipotence in the stroke, there is omnipotence of recoil.”⁵² This is the path that Emerson proposes for the human being who would come into freedom. People are to use the laws of nature (also called “necessity” and

⁵⁰See Walter Harding, *Emerson's Library* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1967).

⁵¹Emerson, “Fate,” in *Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry*, 266.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 267.

"fate" by Emerson) to turn the world to suit their truest selves, which is the single great soul that encompasses all. In order to accomplish this task, "Reason" is the key. Emerson says that "the revelation of Thought takes man out of servitude into freedom."⁵³ Through understanding the workings of the natural world, it becomes possible to employ the laws of nature for desired ends: we come through "Reason" to freedom.

To hazard the contradiction,—freedom is necessity. If you please to plant yourself on the side of Fate, and say, Fate is all; then we say, a part of Fate is the freedom of man. Forever wells up the impulse of choosing and acting in the soul. Intellect annuls Fate. So far as a man thinks, he is free.⁵⁴

Intervention in the workings of nature is possible just to the extent that its workings are understood. Nature always functions in accord with the transcendent law. Within the bounds of the transcendent law humans choose and act in ways that alter outcomes. Obedience to the law is not servile submission but intelligent action—action that by taking into account the laws of nature achieves human ends.

Once some aspect of necessity (or fate or nature) is understood, people may intervene into that necessity with another necessity. In so doing that aspect of nature comes under control, and thus freedom is possible. Emerson does not begrudge the power of fate; rather, he knows that it is only when the laws of fate are understood that choices can be imposed upon the world. Rather than seeing fate as that which mindlessly runs the world, the free man grasps the laws of fate themselves and uses them to his most noble advantage.

⁵³Emerson, "Fate," in *Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry*, 267.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 266.

Nature is what you may do. There is much you may not. We have two things,—the circumstance, and the life. Once we thought positive power was all. Now we learn that negative power, or circumstance, is half. Nature is the tyrannous circumstance, . . . the conditions of a tool, like the locomotive, strong enough on its track, but which can do nothing but mischief off of it; or skates, which are wings on ice but fetters on the ground.⁵⁵

Rather than seeing fate as the power that denies and negates, Emerson understands that it is also the positive framework within which people must act. Freedom requires an intellect capable of knowing the laws of fate. With intellect, fate becomes an empowering circumstance everywhere available to those who understand its laws. In this way even the most free always remain in submission to the laws; they are never broken. With intelligence we may place ourselves onto the side of a necessity yet stronger than the one that would have come into being. This submission is the cost of freedom, if we wish to call it a cost at all.

Emerson's essay "Fate" is a series of paroxysms. Repeatedly, his pitch becomes frenzied with the revelation he exposes. Mid-way through the essay Emerson lays out the true nature of humanity as the nexus of power and fate.

[Man is] a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the Universe. . . . But the lightning which explodes and fashions planets, maker of planets and suns, is in him. On one side elemental order . . . and on the other part thought, the spirit which composes and decomposes nature,—here they are, side by side, god and devil, mind and matter, king and conspirator, belt and spasm, riding peacefully together in the eye and brain of every man.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Emerson, "Fate," in *Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry*, 261.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 265-6.

Everyone has the potential for freedom, though it needs development. The development of freedom requires, for Emerson, the development of "Reason." And by using "Reason" to understand and submit to the transcendent law, one comes to control fate itself. Such is Emerson's idea of freedom. Since Reason requires development, how it is to be developed becomes the concern of education.

Education for Freedom

Emerson will have nothing of the Lockean liberal idea of freedom. He condemns the unthinking attitude of those who believe themselves naturally free. For Emerson the Declaration of Independence is a mere "paper preamble" to freedom.⁵⁷ According to Emerson, freedom requires the use of "Reason," and "Reason" requires development. Freedom is not a natural status but a high promise to which few are able to rise. With regard to education, Emerson repudiates Locke's *tabula rasa*. Education cannot be the filling up of an empty receptacle; rather, it is the development of the universal soul.⁵⁸ This soul (or Over-Soul as Emerson occasionally calls it) is that which humanity shares in common. For Emerson all education is moral education into one great truth. "Let man then learn the revelation of all nature and all thought to his heart; this, namely; that the Highest dwells

⁵⁷Emerson, "Fate," in *Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry*, 266.

⁵⁸Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau*, 76.

with him; that the sources of nature are in his own mind, if the sentiment of duty is there."⁵⁹

One Emerson scholar says about "The American Scholar," that "It is less about American literary nationalism . . . than about reconceptualizing the educational process and its relation to culture as a whole."⁶⁰ In "The American Scholar" Emerson talks about three sources of education: nature, books, and action. By "books" he means the accumulated culture of humankind. All three have their place; the problem of education is in determining their proper relationship so as to facilitate the development of the soul. Too often books, or culture, dominate the whole enterprise of education.

"The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature."⁶¹ Emerson understands that we all live within a world of nature, and that world is endless. It is to be studied and classified, an order put to the, at first, seemingly chaotic movements of nature.

Since the dawn of history there has been a constant accumulation and classifying of facts. But what is classification but the perceiving that these objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also the law of the human mind?⁶²

From this study of nature Emerson believes that self-discovery will come. He says concerning one who would study nature that, "He shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal

⁵⁹Emerson, "The Over-Soul," in *Selected Writings*, 249.

⁶⁰Martin Bickman, "From Emerson to Dewey: The Fate of Freedom in American Education," *American Literary History* 6, no. 3 (Fall 1994), 387.

⁶¹Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selected Writings*, 44.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 45.

and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind."⁶³ This identity between mind and nature is so strong that "the ancient precept, 'Know thyself,' and the modern precept, 'Study nature,' become at last one maxim."⁶⁴ It is this intimate identity between the soul and nature that permits contact with nature to bring out the universal soul, or Over-Soul, which is common to all persons. The Over-Soul is ruled by the transcendent law. Emerson refers to the Over-Soul as "that Unity . . . within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other . . . to which all right action is submission. . . ."⁶⁵

The second educator of humankind is culture, what Emerson calls "the mind of the past." This mind is found in all cultural artifacts but especially in books. Here past thinkers in contact with nature present the facts they have found and the order they have forced upon those facts. Emerson celebrates the book as truth. He says that "The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him life; it went out from him truth."⁶⁶ The problem comes not in the writing of books and the making of all the artifacts of culture. "Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst."⁶⁷ The ill use of books is the attachment of too high an opinion to them. Martin Bickman summarizes this problem. "The central problem, though, is the misguided attempt to

⁶³Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selected Writings*, 45.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁵Emerson, "The Over-Soul" in *Selected Writings*, 237.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selected Writings*, 47.

dwell only in these 'immortal thoughts,' without engaging in the entire cycle, to take the results of someone else's distillation of experience and superimpose it on one's own."⁶⁸ The reaction of the many to the great books of the past is perverted, according to Emerson. "The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and make an outcry if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it."⁶⁹

What then is the right use of books and of culture? "They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system."⁷⁰ This is a radical statement! Modern schools, all too often, seem to use books not to inspire but to capture the mind.

Emerson suggests that in order not to be captured by books we should engage in creative reading. He says, "I would not be hurried by any love of system, by any exaggeration of instincts, to underrate the Book. . . . There is creative reading as well as creative writing."⁷¹ This kind of reading requires a strong hold over ourselves so as not to become captives of the book. The creative reading suggested by Emerson requires that the reader engage the mind in continuous "labor and invention." The book then "becomes luminous with manifold allusion."⁷² That is, the book is a manifold allusion to the world of nature, a world that the creative reader must

⁶⁸Bickman, "From Emerson to Dewey," 388.

⁶⁹Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selected Writings*, 46-7.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 47.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 48.

⁷²*Ibid.*

already possess. Without being grounded in knowledge of the natural world, there is the risk of surrendering all hope of creating new systems, of becoming the creative gods Emerson would have all people become.

The final aspect of education is action. Emerson claims that "Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it he is not yet man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth."⁷³ The life of observing nature and creative reading of other's truths is not enough. The next and culminating step is to put the whole of one's life to the test of life itself. It is, perhaps, with regard to action that Emerson is the most effusive.

I run eagerly into this surrounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life. So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion.⁷⁴

For Emerson action is virtually synonymous with life and experience.

One might object that the above mentioned educational cycle of nature, culture, and action is said by Emerson to be pertinent only to the education of the scholar. But he thought that all people should be scholars. "The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius, not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man."⁷⁵ Thus it must be the true aim of every school to cultivate the active soul and to thereby make possible the genius of all. This education leads to the development of the soul that all persons have in

⁷³Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selected Writings*, 49.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 47.

common. It does not involve the imposition from outside of some foreign substance but the development of each person's deepest self, which is the common, unitary, soul of humanity.

In his essay "Education," Emerson makes many of the same points. Teachers tend to ignore the avenue of action and slight that of nature. Emerson says that the teacher has a "perpetual hankering to violate this individuality, to wrap his [the student's] way of thinking and behavior to resemble or reflect your own thinking and behavior."⁷⁶ Education for freedom must be the development of the internal rather than the imposition of the external. Emerson insists on the central role of action in education. "Archery, cricket, gun and fishing-rod, horse and boat, are all educators. . . ."⁷⁷ It is in such activities that students are tested. The student returns from the stream either with the fish or empty-handed. The arrow strikes the center of the target or misses. The skill is sufficient to attain the desired aim or it is not. No excuse is accepted. Without the test of activity there remains too much room for fantasy and delusion; education lacks worldliness without the test of activity. Thus the focus of education for freedom in Emerson remains in action and in nature. An education that over-values ready-made thoughts available in books cannot be either good education nor conducive to freedom. With a narrow focus on education through books, the student is reduced to the bookworm. "Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and

⁷⁶Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Education," in *Education: An Essay and Other Selections*, ed. Henry Suzzallo, Riverside Educational Monographs (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 11.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 39.

Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books."

These "meek young men" are the opposite of the geniuses that Emerson sought to cultivate. Emerson insists that "The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn."⁷⁸

Newfield understands that for Emerson freedom requires both fluidity and submission. Only by submitting to the transcendent law is it possible to find the openness necessary for action and freedom. The whole of culture can cramp and constrain when presented as a holy thing to be learned and obeyed. But when the cultural artifacts of past genius are seen as merely particular resolutions to on-going problems open to manifold solutions, when the individual finds his/her true identity with humanity and divinity in the Over-Soul through the study of nature, and when one lives within the active testing of life, then people may claim the birthright of freedom, which is the mark of the active soul. The French scholar Maurice Gonnaud sums up well Emerson's notion of freedom. Gonnaud says that "Freedom is not speakable, nor is it even an idea; it lives and it becomes flesh, and this is why Emerson's admiration goes first to those whose temperament made them for action. . . ."⁷⁹

This preference for action may help to explain why some Emerson scholars view his transcendentalism as increasingly turning away from

⁷⁸Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selected Writings*, 47.

⁷⁹Gonnaud, *Individu et Société*, 436. La liberté n'est pas un vocable, ni même une idée, elle se vit et s'incarne, et c'est pourquoi l'admiration d'Emerson va tout d'abord à ceux que leur tempérament a taillés pour l'action. . . .

idealism toward a greater empiricism. Whicher claims that Emerson's later works seem to give greater importance to empirical experience than do the earlier works.⁸⁰ In his first book, *Nature*, Emerson contends that "Empirical science is apt to cloud the sight, and by the very knowledge of functions and processes, to bereave the student of the manly contemplation of the whole."⁸¹ In his more mature work, *Education*, Emerson claims that empirical facts are infinitely valuable to the educated. "The aroused intellect finds gold and gems in one of these scorned facts,—then finds that day of facts is a rock of diamond; that a fact is an Epiphany of God."⁸² Thus, perhaps, we understand Emerson, and Transcendentalism, best when we do not take it in its earliest manifestation, as some form of Idealism. Rather, in its fullest form, Transcendentalism embraces the very concrete experience of life as conducing toward the transcendent.

What need I holier dew
Than Walden's haunted wave,
Distilled from heaven's alembic blue,
Steeped in each forest cave?⁸³

⁸⁰Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, 97. For a fuller account of the difference between the early and late Emerson, see Theodore Gross, "Under the Shadow of Our Swords: Emerson and the Heroic Ideal," in Konvitz, ed. *The Recognition*, 211-223.

⁸¹Emerson, *Nature*, in *Selected Writings*, 34.

⁸²Emerson, *Education*, 8.

⁸³Emerson, "Walden," in *Selected Writings*, 736.

CHAPTER SIX THOREAU'S WORLDLY TRANSCENDENTALISM

Next to us the grandest laws are continually being executed. *Next* to us is not the workman whom we have hired, with whom we love so well to talk, but the workman whose work we are.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

In many ways Henry David Thoreau takes up and continues the work of Emerson. Emerson counsels that nature is essential for education, and Thoreau is the observer of nature par excellence. Emerson counsels creative reading for education, and Thoreau writes *Walden* as a tuition in creative reading. Emerson insists on the active life as the proof and culmination of education, and Thoreau sets off to Walden Pond for two years of active life. After a look at Thoreau's rejection of Lockean society, Thoreau's program of education through nature, culture, and action will be examined. A constant refrain throughout the course of these examinations will be Thoreau's employment of the Emersonian idea of freedom and submission.

Friendship, Freedom and the Critique Lockean Society

Before investigating Thoreau's Transcendentalism, an examination of his rejection of Lockean liberalism will be useful. Nearly one-quarter of the way through *Walden*, Thoreau says

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.¹

It might, therefore, be surprising to learn that, though not reported in *Walden*, much of his two years at the pond was occupied with the writing of a book: *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.² This man who is often understood, or misunderstood, as a recluse, actually busied himself with writing a book detailing his travel with his much loved older brother, John. While at Walden Pond, Thoreau had no desire to live as a hermit but rather as a scholar taking the opportunity to disengage himself from most family affairs so as to engage himself fully in writing and reflection.³ Thoreau had little opportunity to devote himself to writing while living in his parent's home in Concord; his mother took in boarders, and his father's pencil factory, where Thoreau often had to work,

¹Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, in *Walden and Other Writings* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993), 75.

²This book was notoriously unpopular when it first appeared in 1849, and modern readers continue to ignore it. Of the initial printing of 1000 copies, more than 700 remained unsold in 1853 when Thoreau took possession of them from his publisher. After piling up the 700 copies at home in Concord, Thoreau quipped in his journal, "I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself." *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, vol. 5 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 459; quoted in Linck Johnson, *Historical Introduction to The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Carl Hovde (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1980), 471.

³George Hochfield, "New England Transcendentalism," in *The Penguin History of Literature*, vol. 8 *American Literature to 1900*, ed. Marcus Cunliffe (London: Penguin, 1993), 161.

was immediately behind the house.⁴ To the extent that we identify Thoreau as a recluse who lived alone for two years at Walden, we miss the opportunity to find the real Thoreau. And to the extent that we see Thoreau as the writer only of *Walden* and not also of *A Week*,⁵ we miss the opportunity to understand him as something other than the proponent of a radically autonomous Lockean freedom.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers is a set of reflections strung together around the story of a boat trip. Henry and his brother John actually made the journey in September of 1839, but the journey was, as Emerson said, only "a very slender thread for such big beads & ingots as are strung on it."⁶ Philip Abbott considers both *Walden* and *A Week* to be pilgrimages; these pilgrimages "reach beyond Thoreau's personal search in order to portray the outlines of alternative social orders."⁷ Abbott goes on to assert that "*A Week* was an actual experiment . . . to discover not simply an alternate individual life-style, but a different society." Mistakenly, Abbott believes that Thoreau finds this alternative society in a Lockean

⁴Richard Schneider, "Walden," in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed., Joel Myerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 93.

⁵Thoreau saw only two of his books published in his lifetime: *Walden* and *A Week*. He did, however, deliver several, now well-known, lectures and publish several articles during his life. Most of the work published after his death in 1862 was edited by his sister, Sophia, and Ellery Channing.

⁶Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in Henry David Thoreau, *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: A Week*, 458.

⁷Philip Abbott, *States of Perfect Freedom: Autobiography and American Political Thought* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 63.

"state of nature" along the banks of the two rivers, in the rustic farmers and hardy woodsmen.⁸ In making such a claim, Abbott misses the much deeper, but understated, society within Thoreau's little boat.

If Abbott is correct that Thoreau discovers the original Lockean state of nature along the banks of the Concord and Merrimack rivers, then it is a strange society indeed. *Robinson Crusoe*, as the paradigmatic Lockean liberal novel, is marked by the various "social contracts" negotiated between the castaway Crusoe and the men he encounters. As Henry and John Thoreau encounter the inhabitants along the river, there is no need to negotiate society. The farmers and sailors are intelligent and friendly. The Thoreau brothers readily enter into conversation with the local farmers concerning agriculture, weather, and local lore.⁹ Another important identifying characteristic of Locke's state of nature is that it is continuously threatening to degenerate into a state of war; it is precisely this threat that the social contract is meant to avert. Reading the bucolic voyage of the brothers in *A Week* brings up thoughts of a well-run civil society, not of Locke's state of nature on the verge of war.

Another problem in Abbott's identification of Thoreau's trip along the rivers with Locke's state of nature is that though Thoreau repeatedly evinces his concern and even identity with those persons he passes along the banks, they are never quite true men, but only images of men. In examining the structure and some of the metaphors of the text, Richard

⁸Abbott, *States of Perfect Freedom*, 85.

⁹See, for example, Thoreau, *A Week*, 290—the encounter with the melon farmer.

Schneider discovers the idea of the art gallery.¹⁰ The scenes of *A Week* promenade through the book much like a walk through an art gallery. Schneider says that "throughout the book Thoreau describes objects along the river as works of visual art."¹¹ Thoreau even goes so far as to announce this intention of viewing the river and the riverside as paintings. In the chapter "Sunday," Thoreau says that

The air was so elastic and crystalline that it had the same effect on the landscape that a glass has on a picture, to give it an ideal remoteness and perfection. The landscape was clothed in a mild and quiet light, in which the woods and fences checkered and partitioned it with new regularity, and rough and uneven fields stretched away with lawn-like smoothness to the horizon. . . .¹²

Thoreau describes a fisherman with his dog as being "like statues under the other side of the heavens, the only objects to relieve the eye in the extended meadow."¹³ Thoreau's artistic renderings of the men and women along the river combined with multiple digressions into local history and reflections on such diverse topics as Hindu scripture, the poetry of Ossian, Milton, and Shakespeare serve to further distance his encounters with the real inhabitants of the river banks. Schneider remarks about Thoreau in *A Week* that "In the digressions . . . he often

¹⁰Richard Schneider, *Henry David Thoreau*, Twayne's United States Authors Series (Boston: G. K. Hall, Twayne, 1987), 30.

¹¹Schneider, *Henry David Thoreau*, 30. For a detailed account of the relation between Thoreau and the American painters of the Hudson River School, see Perry Miller's "Thoreau in the Context of International Romanticism," in Joseph Moldenhauer, comp., *The Merrill Studies in Walden* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles Merrill, 1971).

¹²Thoreau, *A Week*, 46.

¹³*Ibid.*, 23.

shifts to an impersonal point of view, as if to make a Whitmanesque universal pronouncement rather than a merely personal observation."¹⁴ The residents of the river banks are more Thoreau's own artistic creations than the creatures of a Lockean society. The true community that Thoreau wishes to demonstrate is the community of friendship that exists within the boat, between his brother and himself.

Most readers fail to notice the society of the boat because, as various commentators make clear, Henry's brother is a ghostly figure in the book. Henry and John have no distinct presences. Thoreau's pervasive use of the plural "we" throughout the *A Week* blends John and Henry into a single anonymous narrator. And when their separate actions are described, they are described so that the reader cannot know which of the brothers is performing which action.¹⁵

One of us took the boat over to the opposite shore, which was flat and accessible, a quarter of a mile distant, to empty it of water and wash out the clay, while the other kindled a fire and got breakfast ready.¹⁶

The original relation of one man to another, the relation that Thoreau discovers along the river, the relationship of Henry and John, as shown in *A Week*, is like that Emersonian identity of souls, which manifests itself for Thoreau as true friendship.

The friendship that Thoreau celebrates in the chapter "Wednesday" is "the most ancient and natural of human relationships, an enduring

¹⁴Schneider, *Henry David Thoreau*, 31.

¹⁵Linck Johnson, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," in Myerson ed., *Cambridge Companion*, 48.

¹⁶Thoreau, *A Week*, 118.

bond that transcends death itself."¹⁷ Friendship is Thoreau's functional equivalent of Emerson's Over-Soul. Both are that state of deepest identity with another person, an identity transcendent of the narrow view of self. Thoreau disparages the larger society that surrounds him because of its lack of friendship. "To say that a man is your Friend, means commonly no more than this, that he is not your enemy."¹⁸ Thoreau explains friendship in Biblical language as the deepest possible relationship. The friend says "I will be so related to thee as thou canst imagine; even so thou mayst believe. I will spend truth,—all my wealth on thee. . . ."¹⁹

Thoreauvian friendship often shows itself in social silence rather than in social talk. Of his friends, Thoreau says "They are as full as they are silent, and wait for my plectrum to stir the strings of their lyre."²⁰ Thoreau is not looking for some cheap accord with his own thoughts in the lyre of his friends. He knows the relationship is richer than that. "Friends do not live in harmony merely, as some say, but in melody."²¹ This melody of friendship is the dynamic relationship of Henry and John: the two men taking on tasks that complement each other for the advancement toward a common end. Just one example of this melody of

¹⁷Johnson, "A Week," in Myerson, ed., *Cambridge Companion*, 47. We must also note that *A Week* was written in large part as an eulogy to his brother who died of tetanus in 1842 at the age of 26 and less than three years after the original voyage up the Concord and Merrimack rivers. See Linck Johnson, "Historical Introduction" to Thoreau, *A Week*, 442-3.

¹⁸Thoreau, *A Week*, 266.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 272.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 264.

²¹*Ibid.*, 266.

friendship is the following passage while the brothers are in the canal at Billerica: "while one ran along the tow-path drawing the boat by a cord, the other kept it off the shore with a pole. . . ."22

Thoreau consciously employs the river as his master metaphor in *A Week*.

Trees were but rivers of sap and woody fibre, flowing from the atmosphere, and emptying into the earth by their trunks, as their roots flowed upward to the surface. And in the heavens there were rivers of stars, and milky-ways, already beginning to gleam and ripple over our heads. There were rivers of rock on the surface of the earth, and rivers of ore in its bowels, and our thoughts flowed and circulated, and this portion of time was but the current hour.²³

The river is Thoreau's metaphor of freedom. Abbott observes that "The river itself becomes for Thoreau a metaphor for his own liberation from false human relationships in society."²⁴ Yet we must see that this liberation requires the submission of those who would accept the river's freedom. Just as Emerson insisted that freedom could exist only as the submission to transcendent law, and Huck and Jim find their freedom only while caught within the inexorable flow of the Mississippi, Thoreau too must surrender himself to the river. In deciding to undertake the journey, Thoreau says of the river that

the chips and weeds, and occasional logs and stems of trees, that floated past, fulfilling their fate, were objects of singular interest to me, and at last I resolved to launch myself on its bosom, and float whither it would bear me.²⁵

²²Thoreau, *A Week*, 62.

²³*Ibid.*, 331.

²⁴Abbott, *States of Perfect Freedom*, 63.

²⁵Thoreau, *A Week*, 13.

Thoreau's essay, "A Winter Walk," published in the *Dial*, develops directly out of the manuscript that was later to become *A Week*. In "A Winter Walk" Thoreau says that the river "is a beautiful illustration of the law of obedience, the flow of a river; the path for a sick man, a highway down which an acorn cup may float secure with its freight."²⁶

Walden as Natural Education and Response to Locke and Crusoe

Thoreau deliberately connects his life at Walden with freedom. He records that he first spends both night and day at Walden on the Fourth of July, Independence Day.²⁷ Thus his move from the town of Concord into nature at Walden marks his independence. Emerson claims that nature is the mirror of the human mind and the contact of the two is conducive to the development of the mind along the path of overcoming the narrow sense of self and identifying with god. Thoreau takes up this teaching and actually places himself into the natural world outside of Concord in the fluidity of Walden. Sherman Paul notes that Thoreau identifies society with the fixed, the machine, and identifies nature with change.²⁸

Thoreau and Emerson believe that in contact with nature is the possibility of a fundamental transformation, or redemption, of humanity. Thoreau believes that the study of nature propels one toward a vital

²⁶Thoreau, *A Week*, 448.

²⁷Thoreau, *Walden*, 70.

²⁸Sherman Paul, "A Fable of the Renewal of Life," in *Thoreau: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed., Sherman Paul (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 101.

change in perception, one so important as to be worthy of the name redemption. The study of nature brings with it a shift in metaphysical assumptions as to life, needs, and values.²⁹

All of nature, but especially Walden Pond, functions as a myth for Thoreau—something mundane that conveys a profound spiritual wisdom. Following Emerson's notion of correspondence between nature and the soul (one is seal and one is print³⁰), Thoreau's observations at Walden Pond allow the seal of nature to imprint its wisdom on his soul. *Walden* is the account of this experience. Thoreau had no doubt that people could learn how to live, learn Emerson's transcendent law, through careful observation of nature. Walden Pond itself is Thoreau's myth without equal. He calls it a Lake of Light from which none have learned meanness.³¹

Repeatedly, Walden points to some deeper truth and thus, for those who would observe the pond, there is a ready education. After mapping the pond, Thoreau discovers that "the line of greatest length intersected the line of greatest breadth *exactly* at the point of greatest depth." He goes on to say that "What I have observed of the pond is no less true in ethics." Walden Pond is the real example of Emerson's idea of correspondence. "If we knew all the laws of Nature, we should need only one fact, or the description of one actual phenomenon, to infer all the particular results at

²⁹Bryan Norton, "Thoreau's Insect Analogies: Or, Why Environmentalists Hate Mainstream Economists," *Environmental Ethics* 13 (Fall 1991), 238.

³⁰Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 45.

³¹Thoreau, *Walden*, 165-6.

that point."³² Sherman Paul recognizes this mythic function of the pond.³³ Thoreau acknowledges the pond's symbolic value in its ability to point beyond itself to spiritual truth. "I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless."³⁴

Thoreau's sojourn at Walden Pond is a deliberate attempt at education through nature. As he says, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach. . . ."³⁵ The woods, the animals, the snow, the sounds of Walden Pond are sought after for what they could teach. How different an experiment was *Crusoe's*! The shipwrecked sailor could only see adversity in nature; it had no lessons to teach. Thoreau abandoned the city and went into nature to be instructed; *Crusoe* bemoaned his loss of society and sought to reconstruct a replica of the city life he felt he had lost.³⁶

Thoreau's grandfather was a buccaneer who came to America as the result of a shipwreck.³⁷ Though modern readers frequently miss the connection between *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe*, readers in the 1850s

³²Thoreau, *Walden*, 239-40.

³³See Sherman Paul, "A Fable", 109-110.

³⁴Thoreau, *Walden*, 237.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 75.

³⁶Angus Ross, Introduction to Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin, 1965), 7.

³⁷Schneider, *Henry David Thoreau*, 2.

readily saw it.³⁸ Both books detail the life of a man cut away from the larger society and surviving in a more natural state. Both Thoreau and Crusoe readily accept those implements of society they can salvage from the wrecks around them; Crusoe's wreck is a sailing ship, while Thoreau's is the shanty of James Collins, which he used for its boards, nails, and window.

Thoreau was not as isolated as the reader of *Walden* might suppose. He gave public lectures and sat on the Lyceum committee that was responsible for inviting visiting speakers. He was a continuing force in the local anti-slavery movement; he was a "conductor" in the underground railroad.³⁹ When he went to live at Walden Pond for two years, he regularly walked back into town to engage with friends and family. He frequently had dinner at home in Concord with his family and with the Emersons.⁴⁰ But the visits recorded in *Walden* are of a different sort.

Both Thoreau and Crusoe come into relation with the men who venture into their realms. While Crusoe finds the world populated with cannibals and pirates, the New Englander Thoreau discovers an equally desperate group of people: the businessmen of Concord.

Thoreau admits to enjoying the visits of those who loved the woods. "Girls and boys and young women generally seemed glad to be in

³⁸See the anonymous reviews of *Walden* published in 1854 in Joel Myerson, ed., *Critical Essays on Henry David Thoreau's Walden*, (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988), 25-6.

³⁹Robert Richardson, Jr. "Thoreau and Concord" in Myerson, ed., *Cambridge Companion*, 15.

⁴⁰Schneider, *Henry David Thoreau*, 14.

the woods. They looked in the pond and at the flowers, and improved their time."⁴¹ The more practical men were the particular bane of the poet of *Walden*.

Restless committed men, whose time was all taken up in getting a living or keeping it; ministers who spoke of God as if they enjoyed a monopoly of the subject, who could not bear all kinds of opinions; doctors, lawyers, uneasy housekeepers who pried into my cupboard and bed when I was out . . . young men who had ceased to be young, and had concluded that it was safest to follow the beaten track of the professions—all these generally said that it was not possible to do so much good in my position.⁴²

Thus Thoreau seems to divide the population of Concord into two groups: those persons like himself who came into the woods to free themselves from the demands of civilized living, if even for an hour, and those who cared not to free themselves from the tyranny of a perverse business-oriented society. Already in *A Week* Thoreau had identified "the industrious white farmer as a figure of death, the grim reaper whose immediate victims are the indigenous inhabitants of the land."⁴³ And just as the little raft of Huck and Jim is attacked by the giant river boat (representing commerce and modernity), Henry and John in *A Week* are threatened by the large commercial vessels on the river.

⁴¹Thoreau, *Walden*, 126.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 126-7.

⁴³Johnson, "A Week," in Myerson, ed., *Cambridge Companion*, 49. Thoreau's criticism of America's all-consuming passion for business continues to develop in *Walden* and reaches a crescendo in *Life Without Principle* (1854), where Thoreau says "I think that there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, ay, to life itself, than this incessant business." Thoreau, "Life Without Principle," in *Walden and Other Writings*, 350.

Thinking ourselves the only navigators of these waters, suddenly a canal boat, with its sail set, glided round a point before us, like some huge river beast, and changed the scene in an instant; and then another and another glided into sight, and we found ourselves in the current of commerce once more.⁴⁴

In *Walden*, the condemnation of "business" becomes a major theme, whereas Crusoe returns to England a wealthy man because of the business he had built in South America before the shipwreck. Thoreau understands that commerce has so dominated the consciousness of most of his fellow Concordians that little space is left in their souls for higher things. "He pictures a contemporary Concord where everyone is implicated in the market, and he mounts a critique of that society as antithetical to independence, to identity, and to life itself."⁴⁵ The problem is not commerce itself, Thoreau was a pencil-maker and surveyor, but with the all-consuming attitude of business. Thoreau finds his neighbors "so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them."⁴⁶ It is as if the mass of men had indeed mistaken (as Newfield claimed with regard to Emerson) the laws of the market place for those of eternity. Michael Gilmore provides an analysis of Thoreau's attitude toward that aspect of reification that Thoreau diagnoses in the depths of America. Though the idea of the progressive erosion of humanity due to the reification of the laws of the market is usually credited to Georg Lukács, Gilmore finds the theme in

⁴⁴Thoreau, *A Week*, 144.

⁴⁵Michael Gilmore, "Walden and the 'Curse of Trade'" in Myerson, ed., *Critical Essays*, 178.

⁴⁶Thoreau, *Walden*, 5.

Walden.⁴⁷ The businessmen of Concord are worse than the cannibals faced by Robinson Crusoe. Crusoe was disgusted at the prospect of men eating other men, but they, at least, consumed only the members of competing tribes. Thoreau is witness to the even more gruesome fate of a man consuming himself and his neighbors in business.

Thoreau, and Emerson, find that nature offers what the business life cannot: an educating myth of transformation or redemption. Thoreau frequently finds the myth of redemption played out in nature. Bryan Norton traces Thoreau's use of insect metaphors. Norton finds that "Thoreau's *Walden*, as well as his other writings, is sprinkled with analogies and metaphors drawn from wild species and applied to human life."⁴⁸ Norton focuses on Thoreau's use of the metaphorical image of the transformation of the larva into a butterfly. Norton says that for Thoreau the "gross feeding" stage of the larva corresponds to "materialistic consumerism," which is an "immature development stage of the person."⁴⁹ The butterfly sips slightly at very select nourishment. In this way the natural world provides an education for humanity. Human beings are called upon to make a similar transformation away from "gross feeding," which is business and rank consumerism, to the higher stage of contemplation and perfection. Sherman Paul finds the same call for the transformation of humanity in Thoreau and calls it renewal and redemption. Paul says "These natural facts became the metaphors in

⁴⁷Gilmore, "Walden and the 'Curse of Trade,'" in Myerson, ed., *Critical Essays*, 181.

⁴⁸Norton, "Thoreau's Insect Analogies," 236.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 237.

terms of which he [Thoreau] told of his desire to pass from a lower to a higher form of life, from fixity to fluidity . . . from innocence of youth to the wisdom of maturity, from larval sensuality to aerial purity."⁵⁰

Lessons in Creative Reading

Emerson claims that the second requirement of good education is creative reading: "One must be an inventor to read well. . . . There is then creative reading as well as creative writing."⁵¹ This creative reading serves to free one from becoming captivated by the thought of others; it serves, as Emerson says, to inspire, to develop the soul. Thus creative reading is an important skill in an education for freedom. Thoreau gives his readers an excellent tuition on the subject of creative reading. The Thoreau scholar Joseph Moldenhauer says that "'paradox' has always been a key term in Thoreau scholarship."⁵² The number of examples that one could give of such paradoxes is enormous. Moldenhauer says that Thoreau uses paradox "in such quantity and of such significance that we are reminded of the works of Donne, Sir Thomas Browne, and other English metaphysical writers."⁵³ Thoreau's use of paradox is the key element in the lessons he teaches concerning creative reading.

⁵⁰Paul, "A Fable," 101.

⁵¹Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selected Writings*, 48.

⁵²Joseph Moldenhauer, "The Extra-vagant Maneuver: Paradox in *Walden*," in Myerson, ed., *Critical Essays*, 96.

⁵³*Ibid.*

That Emerson requires creative reading on the part of his audience is doubtlessly true. In reading Emerson, one is continuously struck by his use of syntax. Emerson, the poet, challenges the reader to understand him, to enter into his complex and creative ordering of words. But, ultimately, the challenge of Emerson's syntax requires relatively little of the reader. By reordering the syntax, much of what Emerson says is readily understood. Emerson provides on the page itself most of what is required to understand him. In contrast, Thoreau's preference for paradox provides the greater challenge to the creative reader, and thus the more rewarding lesson. All is not provided on the page. The reader must take something from him/herself and give it to the text in order to overcome the paradox—creative reading becomes generous reading.

Moldenhauer states that "The user of paradox thus defines or declares by indirection, frustrating 'rational' expectations about language."⁵⁴ Thoreau is well aware of the complexity of the language he employs. In the chapter on "Visitors" in *Walden*, Thoreau explains the care that is required for the proper employment of language in the process of communication.

One inconvenience I sometimes experienced in so small a house, the difficulty of getting to a sufficient distance from my guest when we began to utter the big thoughts in big words. You want room for your thoughts to get into sailing trim and run a course or two before they make their port. The bullet of your thought must have overcome its lateral and ricochet motion and fallen into its last and steady course before it reaches the ear of the hearer, else it may plow out again through the side of his head.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Moldenhauer, "The Extra-vagant," 97.

⁵⁵Thoreau, *Walden*, 116-7.

These language bullets and sailing ships are contrasted to the more ordinary use of words in ordinary books. Most men learn to read only for "paltry convenience;" the deeper (and more demanding) side of reading—what Thoreau calls its "noble exercise"—is present in but few people.⁵⁶ Thoreau claims that, just as there are the machines that print these impoverished texts, most people are the "machines" to read them.⁵⁷

In order not to become such reading machines, we must find an alternate way of reading, a creative way. In the chapter entitled "Reading," Thoreau says that it is not simply that too often we engage in the reading of machine-written texts but that we read as if we too were machines: incapable of any deeper thought. Thoreau has a remedy. "We must laboriously seek the meaning of each word and line, conjecturing a larger sense than common use permits out of what wisdom and valor and generosity we have."⁵⁸ If we are lacking in such wisdom and valor, Thoreau can help us to find, at least, a little generosity in our reading. In "Sounds" Thoreau says that "Much is published, but little printed."⁵⁹ Giving but a mean reading to the line, how can it be understood? It seems a paradox. Giving a generous enough reading to the line resolves the paradox. To publish also means to make public; this may be done through sounds as well as printing. And it is to the sounds of nature that are forever unprinted (yet widely "published") that Thoreau would have his readers attend.

⁵⁶Thoreau, *Walden*, 86.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 92.

Thoreau says about fishing that the legislature knew "nothing about the hook of hooks with which to angle for the pond itself. . . ."60 How can one understand such a line? How can one "angle for the pond"? Moldenhauer finds an answer through generous reading. He says that "The pond in its most consistent symbolic role is the self, the beholder's own profound nature."⁶¹ Thus we come to see that much of Thoreau's fishing is more than fishing for fish; he fishes within himself as well.

It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonical themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element, which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook.⁶²

Thoreau would teach his readers to be more generous readers if they would but follow his advice in the art of creative reading. "We must laboriously seek the meaning of each word and line, conjecturing a larger sense than common use permits out of what wisdom and valor and generosity we have."⁶³ Such creative reading can only aid education. Creative reading provides the energy to counter what Emerson refers to as the tendency of books to capture the mind. If Emerson is correct that true education cannot be the filling of a *tabula rasa*, but must be the drawing out of the soul, then Thoreau's creative/generous reading that asks each reader to draw out of him/herself sufficient meaning to understand the

⁶⁰Thoreau, *Walden*, 178.

⁶¹Moldenhauer, "The Extra-vagant," 105.

⁶²Thoreau, *Walden*, 146.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 83.

text becomes an exercise in freedom. The typical understanding of freedom claims that possessing more wealth or more power allows for greater freedom—allows one to do what one wants. Thoreau rejects this notion in his idea of generous reading. It is not how much one accumulates that makes one free but how much one can give. Most books, and most political systems, do not demand generosity; they demand very little. Thoreau's response is to write books that demand generous/creative reading in order to be understood at all. In assessing the typical demands of society Thoreau laments that "Though we have gold to give, they demand only copper."⁶⁴ We could say the same of most books and of most education.

Education Through Action—The Lesson of *Walden*

The third and final Emersonian requirement of education is that of action. Thoreau makes much of the education that is provided by the active life. "How could youth better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of living?" Thoreau criticizes the more usual kind of education in which the student is separated from the realities of life. The experiment of life itself is the better teacher. Thoreau asks,

Which would have advanced the most at the end of a month, —the boy who had made his own jack-knife from the ore which he had dug and smelted, reading as much as would be necessary for this,—or the boy who had attended the lectures on metallurgy at the Institute in the meanwhile, and had received a Rodgers penknife from his father?"⁶⁵

⁶⁴Thoreau, *A Week*, 267.

⁶⁵Thoreau, *Walden*, 42.

Thoreau requires that education be constantly tested in the school of action. The two years spent at Walden is Thoreau's education in action. Thoreau claims that one can live simply and thus have more time to develop one's deeper self. Thoreau's life at Walden is the strictest test of this assertion. He keeps rigorous accounts of time and money spent to prove it. In the end, he says, "I learned from my two years' experience that it would cost incredibly little trouble to obtain one's necessary food, even in this latitude; that a man may use as simple a diet as the animals, and yet retain health and strength."⁶⁶ Thus Thoreau claims that his findings are not mere fantasy but that all of them have been made to answer to the test of action.

Summary: Transcendental Education for Freedom

Emerson outlined a system of education for freedom in three parts: nature, culture (or books creatively read), and action. He focuses particularly on the need to "draw out the soul" so that all persons realize their identity with god in the Over-Soul. Emerson knows the difficulty of this task of drawing out each person's truest self. The rigorous program of nature study, creative reading, and testing oneself through active participation in the world stands in stark opposition to the Lockean liberal contention that freedom is natural and thus needs no development. Thoreau's *Walden*, makes clear the profound spiritual lessons that may be

⁶⁶Thoreau, *Walden*, 50.

learned from nature. Thoreau finds the Emersonian correspondence between nature and the soul; nature is the grand symbol or myth pointing always beyond itself toward a spiritual world. By studying nature, all persons can read the myth and symbol of nature so as to bring out their own true identity. Also, *Walden*, especially in its use of paradox, provides an advanced course in creative (or generous) reading. The reader must reach deep into the well of generosity to understand what Thoreau is saying. By developing the habit of generous reading, the trap of others' thoughts is avoided. Finally, *Walden* in its appeal to the real results of human action justifies what is learned on the basis of actual result. Transcendental education in freedom is a powerful adversary to the mechanical and mean education that demands so little of students. But there is some question as to its usefulness today. Emerson and Thoreau are educators of the soul. They would have all students find deep within themselves their ultimate identity with the world that transcends the isolated individual. Emerson and Thoreau are nineteenth century romantics; much of what they say, and how they say it, seems old-fashioned today. In the next chapter, John Dewey proposes a scientific vision of education that may be more attractive to the twentieth century.

CHAPTER SEVEN
DEWEY'S FREEDOM AND THE SCIENTIFIC RE-VISION OF
TRANSCENDENTAL REASON

Freedom is the "truth of necessity" only when we use one "necessity" to alter another. When we use the law to foresee consequences and to consider how they may be averted or secured, then freedom begins.

—John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*

America's Transcendental Heritage

Transcendentalism is recognized as an ongoing presence in American literature and philosophy. Roger Asselineau says that Emerson considered Walt Whitman a Transcendentalist. "It seemed to him [Emerson] that Whitman was the poet whose coming he had prophesied. Indeed, in many respects, *Leaves of Grass* was a translation into verse of the main tenets of the transcendentalist doctrine. . . ."¹ Asselineau goes on to find transcendental themes working in Theodore Dreiser, Eugene O'Neil, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, Tennessee Williams, and Walter Lowenfels.² Though Transcendentalism as a distinct group of associated American intellectuals

¹Roger Asselineau, *The Transcendentalist Constant in American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 18.

²Asselineau, *The Transcendental Constant*, passim.

centered in Concord ends at the beginning of the Civil War, many of its themes continue to influence American thought.

Transcendentalist influence is found not only in the work of many important American writers but also among philosophers. Though Emerson and Thoreau as Transcendental philosophers have yet to gain entry into the mainstream of American philosophy, they exercise subtle influence over much of subsequent American pragmatic philosophy. Charles Sanders Peirce was never mainstream, but he usually is credited as the originator of American Pragmatism. Peirce admitted, reluctantly, that he had been influenced by Emerson.

I was born and reared in the neighborhood of Concord—I mean Cambridge—at the time when Emerson, Hedge, and their friends were disseminating the ideas that they had caught from Schelling, and Schelling from Plotinus, from Boehm, or from God knows what minds stricken with the monstrous mysticism of the East. . . . [I]t is probable that some cultured bacilli, some benignant form of the disease was implanted in my soul, unawares, and that now, after long incubation, it comes to the surface, modified by mathematical conceptions and by training in physical investigation.³

Though it would be simplistic, not to say mistaken, to argue that John Dewey is a Transcendentalist, much is missed in not seeing the very real points of contact between Dewey and Transcendentalism.

Transcendentalism can refer to either the American tradition lead by Emerson or to German Idealist philosophers such as Kant, Schelling, and Hegel. The two traditions are linked in their basic epistemology, although

³Charles Sanders Peirce, "The Law of the Mind" in *Collected Papers*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vol. 6, § 102 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934), 86-87; quoted in John McDermott, *Streams of Experience: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of American Culture* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 30.

that link is quite strained. Emerson admits that his own idea of "Transcendentalism" is derived from Kant. He credits Kant with a powerful critique of Locke's notion of the *tabula rasa*; Kant claims that there is a class of concepts that are not derived from experience. These concepts are prior to and necessary for experience and are thereby transcendental.⁴ The Transcendental epistemology of Emerson, explained in his essay "The Transcendentalist" (1843), values intuition over experience, or as it was formulated in an earlier chapter, "Reason" is valued over "reason." Dewey certainly rejects Emerson's claim for the status of Reason.

Dewey's Education

That Dewey gained substantial knowledge of Transcendental thought while at the University of Vermont is certain. James Marsh⁵ was President of the University from 1826 to 1833, and stayed on as a central figure in the school and as professor of philosophy until his death in 1842.⁶ Under his leadership the University developed a reputation for advanced thought.⁷

⁴Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Transcendentalist," in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library), 86.

⁵Marsh is the central figure in the early development of American Transcendentalism. For an account of the development of Marsh's Vermont Transcendentalism see Marjorie Nicolson, "James Marsh and the Vermont Transcendentalists," *Philosophical Review* 34 (1925): 28-50.

⁶Ronald Wells, *Three Christian Transcendentalists: James Marsh, Caleb Sprague Henry, Frederic Henry Hedge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 14.

⁷George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 9.

This "advanced thought" was largely German Idealism as redacted through Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Marsh made Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* available in America in 1829,⁸ and it was this book that had a powerful influence over Emerson's, and the other American Transcendentalist's, understanding of "Reason." Marsh's "Preliminary Essay" included in this edition of Coleridge's text also influenced Emerson and subsequent American Transcendental thought. In this essay Marsh insisted that religious truth could be found only in the soul, which is amenable to "Reason" but not necessarily to "Understanding," (or "reason") which is "the faculty of judging according to sense."⁹ Peter Carafiol traces the path from Kant to Emerson through Coleridge and Marsh:

Kant had separated sensation from reason, arguing that the mind knows only phenomena. Coleridge had altered Kant, making reason constitutive rather than regulative, a power of intellectual insight into noumenal truths, a route to the absolute. Marsh converted this power of insight from a process of intellectual reflection on the inner workings of the mind to an intuitive harmony between the mind and the divine spirit, and Emerson extended that harmonious sympathy to include all of nature.¹⁰

Though Dewey was not to enter the University of Vermont until some thirty years after Marsh's death, there was still much of Marsh's influence to be felt. Coleridge's understanding of Kant as refracted through Marsh's own mind came to be called Vermont Transcendentalism, and

⁸Peter Carafiol, *Transcendent Reason: James Marsh and the Forms of Romantic Thought* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1982), xv.

⁹James Marsh, "Preliminary Essay," in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. James Marsh (Burlington, Vermont, 1829); quoted in Carafiol, *Transcendent Reason*, 80.

¹⁰Carafiol, *Transcendent Reason*, 81-2.

Marsh made it the focus of the University's curriculum. Marsh had a good knowledge of Kant and of German Idealism in general.¹¹ But his closest intellectual alliance was with Coleridge. As President of the University, he surrounded himself with like-minded thinkers, including his friend Joseph Torrey who was also well versed in German Idealism. By the time Dewey arrived, Henry (H.A.P) Torrey had taken over for his uncle Joseph Torrey and was teaching Kant.¹²

At the time of Dewey's arrival in 1875, the University was still a good place to study German Idealism and Vermont Transcendentalism. Dewey read Marsh's work on psychology, Coleridge's *Aid to Reflection*, and was often engaged in Kant's work as assigned reading at the University of Vermont.¹³ Late in his life Dewey fondly remembered the influence of Marsh and Coleridge on his own thought. "Yes, I remember very well that this was our spiritual emancipation in Vermont. . . . This *Aids to Reflection*, in Marsh's edition, was my first bible . . . I never did change my religious view."¹⁴ Dewey developed a lasting friendship with "Hap" Torrey,

¹¹John Duffy, introduction to *Coleridge's American Disciples: The Selected Correspondence of James Marsh* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 26. See also Ronald Wells, *Three Christian Transcendentalists*, 15n. For Dewey's account of Marsh's influence on American philosophy and knowledge of Kant, see John Dewey, "James Marsh and American Philosophy" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 (April 1941): 131-150; reprinted in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953, vol. 5: 1929-1930*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 1984), 178-196.

¹²Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, 14-16.

¹³*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴John Dewey quoted in Duffy, introduction to *Coleridge's American Disciples*, 30.

who was his professor of mental and moral philosophy and was himself a philosopher in the "intuitionist" tradition much under the influence of Kant.¹⁵

Dewey continued his work in the German Idealist tradition at Johns Hopkins, where he studied for his doctorate. At Johns Hopkins Dewey moved into Hegel and Neo-Hegelian studies but also continued his work on Kant. Dewey's doctoral dissertation was on the psychology of Kant. While at Johns Hopkins Dewey published three papers, all of them essentially Hegelian.¹⁶ The first reference to Emerson in Dewey's published work comes in his essay "Interest as Related to Will," published in 1896, in which he makes reference to Emerson's essay "Compensation." Though Dewey makes reference to Emerson only to object to his idea of compensation, the essay shows that Dewey is familiar with Emerson's work.¹⁷ By the turn of the century, Dewey's understanding of American Transcendentalism was such that among his contributions to a dictionary of philosophy were his entries for the "Oversoul" and "Transcendentalism."¹⁸ All of these connections are not an argument that Dewey became a

¹⁵Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, 14 and 15.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 34-7.

¹⁷John Dewey, "Interest as Related to Will" (Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph, 1896); revised and reprinted (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1899); reprinted in *The Early Works of John Dewey, 1882-1898 vol. 5: 1895-1898, Early Essays* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 115.

¹⁸See James Baldwin, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, vol. 2 (New York, Macmillan, 1902); reprinted in *John Dewey, The Middle Works, 1899-1924, vol. 2: 1902-1903*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 180 and 258.

Transcendentalist, but that he was deeply educated in that tradition at the University of Vermont and Johns Hopkins.¹⁹

Dewey's Return to the Language of "reason"

John McDermott sees much to connect Dewey and Emerson. Just as important are the differences between the two. McDermott stresses that much of the seeming opposition between Dewey and Emerson is in their respective use of language.

Just as Emerson broke with the theological language of his immediate predecessors and many of his peers, so too did Dewey break with the ecstatic religious language of Emerson. This break in language should not hide from us that Dewey's understanding of the relationship which exists between nature and human life, echoes that of Emerson: always possibility, often celebration, frequently mishap and never absolute certitude.²⁰

The difference in language between Dewey and the Transcendentalists is not merely a difference in the choice of terms. Dewey's language marks his refusal to accept the transcendental notion of "Reason," and this refusal marks his opposition to Transcendentalism. Though Dewey was something of a Transcendentalist early in his adult life, nonetheless he was not comfortable within that tradition and sought something more satisfactory. Dewey particularly chafed at the numerous dualisms that Transcendental thinkers presumed. His turn toward Hegel at Johns Hopkins and his

¹⁹Dewey's own account of his intellectual development at the University of Vermont, Johns Hopkins, and beyond is provided in "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953, vol. 5: 1929-1930*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 147-160.

²⁰McDermott, *Streams of Experience*, 35.

increasing confidence in the world of experience meant that Dewey could overcome these dualisms in the common experience of life itself. In so doing, Dewey no longer saw the need for some transcendental "glue" to hold the world together. Thus there was no longer a need for Marsh's (or Emerson's) Transcendental conception of "Reason." Dewey found "reason" fully adequate to cope with the world of a human experience that was not presumed *a priori* to be cut off from nature. Thus Dewey could avoid Emerson's language of Reason and return to a more traditional sense of reason.

In *Experience and Nature* Dewey asserts that "Thought and reason are not specific powers. They consist of the procedures intentionally employed in the application to each other of the unsatisfactorily confused and indeterminate on one side and the regular and stable on the other."²¹ Dewey understands the process of thought as the attempt to render intelligible and stable a world that we find confused and changeable. Thus for Dewey reason is a useful process whereby human interaction with the world becomes more orderly, stable, and useful. Dewey objects to those who might claim that reason is a thing itself and eternal. Dewey says that reason is never an "'end in itself.' To imagine it [so] . . . is to transport it outside of the natural world, to convert it into a god . . . outside of the contingencies of existence and untouched by its vicissitudes."²² He goes on to say, "'Reason' as a faculty separate from experience, introducing us to a superior region of universal truths begins now to strike us as remote, uninteresting and unimportant."²³

²¹John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958), 67.

²²Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 435.

²³Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 95.

Dewey provides an understanding of reason that breaks from such abstraction and absolutism. He says, "reason is experimental intelligence, conceived after the pattern of science. . . ." ²⁴ This experimental reason functions as follows:

Concrete suggestions arising from past experiences, developed and matured in the light of the needs and deficiencies of the present, employed as aims and methods of specific reconstruction, and tested by success or failure in accomplishing this task of re-adjustment, suffice. ²⁵

Though both Dewey's and the Transcendental notions of reason function as avenues of access to secure knowledge, they are distinct. Emerson's Reason is transcendental and a mode of access to a supra-mundane world; Dewey's reason, which is essentially experimental and thereby empirical, must be radically different. No matter how much Emerson might claim, and others want to understand, that he is an empiricist, Emerson holds to a sense of Reason that is incompatible with such an assertion. Dewey never accepted Marsh's, Coleridge's, or Emerson's understanding of Reason. Though there are points of contact between the philosophies of Dewey and Emerson, this point of difference is very much the source of many of their language differences. Dewey's reason cannot look beyond the world and Emerson's must.

Foundations of Dewey's Concept of Freedom

Dewey's understanding of freedom does not stand alone, separated from the larger body of his work. His ontological and epistemological

²⁴Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 96.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 95-6.

foundations strongly influence his concept of freedom. First, on the level of ontology Dewey finds the world to be an open and precarious place, always in flux. Second, epistemologically, Dewey understands that human experience is not cut off from nature. Therefore he places primary value upon actual lived experience. And, third, these ontological and epistemological foundations lead Dewey to certain political conclusions about the nature of freedom and its requirement for democratic social organizations. In developing these ideas, four key topics will be considered: the idea of the open universe, the human connection with nature, the centrality of pragmatic inquiry, and the nature of democracy.

The Open Universe—Ontology, Part 1

However Dewey's religious beliefs may stand, he does share a strikingly animated view of the world with Emerson and Thoreau. Dewey's ontology admits the necessity of uncertainty. He says, "Man finds himself living in an aleatory world; his existence involves, to put it baldly, a gamble. The world is a scene of risk; it is uncertain, unstable, uncannily unstable."²⁶ McDermott says that, "when faced with this extremely open and even perilous version of nature, Dewey calls upon philosophy to act as an intelligent mapping, so as to reconstruct, ameliorate, and enhance the human condition."²⁷ Though Dewey assures us that much can be done to reduce the amount of uncertainty in our lives, ultimately, some level of uncertainty must remain.

²⁶Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 41.

²⁷McDermott, *Streams of Experience*, 35.

We live in a world which is an impressive and irresistible mixture of sufficiencies, tight completenesses, order, recurrences which make possible prediction and control, and singularities, ambiguities, uncertain possibilities, processes going on to consequences as yet indeterminate. They are mixed not mechanically but vitally like the wheat and tares of the parable. We may recognize them separately but we cannot divide them, for unlike wheat and tares they grow from the same root.²⁸

Dewey describes an older sense of the world as fixed and closed as a "feudal" system in which different levels of the universe were more or less superior and gave service to each other. He believes that modern science has produced a radically different understanding of the world. The modern world is "open" in the sense that it is "multiplex" and "cannot be summed up and grasped in any one formula."²⁹ Dewey claims that this open quality of the world is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for human freedom. "In a world which was completely tight and exact in all its constituents, there would be no room for freedom."³⁰ Whereas the older system saw the world a "constant in existence," modern science sees no constancy in existence but only a constancy "in function."³¹ In short, the modern conception of the world finds constancy only in "laws" and "relations" that order the world but not in the particular existing things of the world.

Dewey says, "Empirically, individualized objects, unique affairs, exist. But they are evanescent, unstable. They tremble on the verge of

²⁸Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 47.

²⁹Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 61.

³⁰John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1929), 249.

³¹Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 61.

disappearance as soon as they appear." While Dewey admits that some things are eternal, the eternal, properly speaking, has no existence, i.e., eternal things are not empirical objects in the world. "Timeless laws, taken by themselves, like all universals, express dialectic intent, not any matter of fact existence."³² Dewey even admits the propriety of the use of the term "eternal," but with qualifications. "If anybody feels relieved by calling them eternal, let them be called eternal." In the same breath Dewey qualifies his statement. "But let not 'eternal' be then conceived as a kind of absolute perduring existence or Being. It denotes just what it denotes: irrelevance to existence in its temporal quality."³³

Emerson's ontology also admits of uncertainty. Because Emerson believes that everything is in some degree god, the universal process of creation is never finished. Emerson claims it is the responsibility of human creativity to continually function in its god-like nature to reconstruct the world.³⁴ In his essay "Circles," Emerson says, "There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees."³⁵ In his essay "Nominalist and Realist," Emerson says that nature is all inclusive. Like Dewey's wheat and tares, Emerson claims that nature is inclusive of the contradictory. "You are one thing, but Nature is *one thing*

³²Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 148.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 47.

³⁵Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles" in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 252.

and the other thing, in the same moment."³⁶ Thus both Dewey and Emerson teach that the world is a place of possibility and uncertainty. No matter how much may be done to reconstruct the world, some residue of uncertainty must remain.

The Connection of Human Experience to Nature—Ontology, Part 2

Dewey and Emerson take as one of their most vital tasks the recovery of human contact with the natural world. And though their respective solutions to this problem are marked by their methods of inquiry, they come to the same conclusion: human experience is not cut off from nature.

Dewey criticizes those who would cut human experience off from nature. He knows that many philosophers conceive of human experience as a "veil or screen which shuts us off from nature, unless in some way it can be 'transcended'". So something non-natural by way of reason or intuition is introduced, something supra-empirical."³⁷ Dewey believes that philosophy has need for some Transcendental Reason only when human experience is cut off from nature. Once we realize that human experience can occur only within a natural world, the need for some trans-mundane or transcendental avenue of approach into nature is rendered otiose. Dewey claims that in normal contact with nature, human beings always already have what Transcendental thinkers (both German and American) try so hard to regain after having split the human apart from the natural. Experience and nature

³⁶Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nominalist and Realist" in *The Selected Writing of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 395.

³⁷Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 1a. This is clearly a reference to Kantian thought.

are in constant communication according to Dewey. He says, "Experience thus reaches down into nature; it has depth."³⁸ Thus reason as a human activity becomes, for Dewey, the intelligent direction of experience; reason guides the experience of nature if experience is to be fruitful.

Emerson says of Nature that it can, through patient study, become an "open book" and every aspect of nature "significant" of some profounder law.³⁹ Nonetheless, Emerson insists that Nature is not itself that profound law, it is rather a sort of complex system of signs for the spiritual law that transcends this world. As such, Emerson does not claim that human experience is cut off from nature but from spiritual truth. Thus Nature functions as the transcendent intermediary that rejoins human life to its spiritual significance. Emerson does not squarely fall into Dewey's critique of Transcendentalism, as they both claim that human experience goes on within nature.

Pragmatic Inquiry—Epistemology

For Dewey, the "essential feature" of pragmatic thought "is to maintain the continuity of knowing with an activity which purposely modifies the environment."⁴⁰ That is to say that, knowledge must not become disconnected from the human life that uses it. Knowledge is that which

³⁸Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 4a.

³⁹Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature in Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 18.

⁴⁰Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 344.

people use to adapt themselves to their environment and to adapt their environment to themselves. Any knowledge that has no such function is not worthy of being called knowledge. Dewey condemns the tradition that claimed knowledge was essentially contemplative rather than active.⁴¹

Facts are for Dewey ineluctable. "They are the things that are there, that have to be reckoned with."⁴² Dewey repeatedly says that even thought itself is not complete until it has been tested in action. In his explanation of a complete act of thought Dewey declares that the "concluding phase" of thought must involve "some kind of testing by overt action to give experimental corroboration, or verification, of the conjectured idea."⁴³ Good thinking is not limited to the observation of the empirical, but the empirical provides the real-world test of all knowledge. The testing of ideas is vital to good thinking because it is "the presence of testing operations that transform what would otherwise have been loose thinking into reflective activity."⁴⁴ Essentially, what Dewey means by "reflective activity" is good, i.e., effective, thinking.

Though Emerson's Transcendentalism is often misunderstood to have ignored the material world in favor of some Transcendental ideal, Emerson is better understood as something of a proto-pragmatist in his method of inquiry. In a previous chapter, Emerson's movement toward a more empirical basis of understanding has been examined. In his later writings

⁴¹Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 112.

⁴²John Dewey, *How We Think in John Dewey The Later Works, 1925-1953, vol. 8: 1933*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 196.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 205.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 192.

especially, Emerson revels in experience and in action rather than in other-worldly idealism. It is in his preference for action and the empirical that Emerson's Transcendentalism has its closest relation to Dewey.

In reference to the man who would be "prudent," Emerson says, "Let him have accurate perceptions. Let him, if he have hands, handle; if eyes, measure and discriminate; let him accept and hive every fact of chemistry, natural history and economics. . . ."45 The effect of an unwillingness to be prudent is plain. Ben Franklin's homey wisdom is no more plain-spoken than Emerson's. "If the hive be disturbed by rash and stupid hands, instead of honey it will yield us bees."⁴⁶ Emerson suggests that his readers accept these lessons of nature. And though these lessons point toward a transcendent realm, the very worldly lessons taught by nature are not themselves to be disvalued. "Let him esteem Nature a perpetual counsellor, and her perfections the exact measure of our deviations."⁴⁷

Dewey's own assessment of Emerson's idealism seems to link the two philosophers quite closely. Dewey finds Emerson's idealism very much grounded in the material world. He finds that Emerson's "idealism" is "a narrowly accurate description of the facts of the most real world in which all earn their living."⁴⁸ Dewey sees in Emerson a concern for empirical results

⁴⁵Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Prudence" in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 218.

⁴⁶Emerson, "Prudence" in *Selected Writings*, 218-9.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁸John Dewey, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," *International Journal of Ethics* (July 1903); reprinted in *Character and Events: Popular Essays in Social and Political Philosophy by John Dewey*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Ratner (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1929), 73.

that distances him from the typical understanding of Idealism and Transcendentalism.

I fancy he reads the so-called eclecticism of Emerson wrongly who does not see that it is reduction of all philosophers of the race, even the prophets like Plato and Proclus whom Emerson holds most dear, to the test of trial by the service rendered the present and immediate experience.⁴⁹

Dewey values Emerson's requirement that all thinking be held accountable in the test of action or experience—a pragmatic test.

The World of Possibility as the Link to Democracy—Politics

What is humanity to do within this empirical yet uncertain world? Dewey and Emerson agree. The uncertain universe requires flexible community. Since no one can permanently stem the flux of life within uncertain nature, the only proper response must be to accept that flux, that possibility, that readiness to change and to adapt continuously and without final termination. For both Dewey and Emerson, their ontology of uncertainty requires a form of social organization that is most able to cope with the uncertain. For both Dewey and Emerson, their demand for empirical testing requires that any social system be accountable on the basis of worldly results. The only system of social relations answering the demands of their ontology and epistemology is democracy.

Dewey interprets Emerson's life work as democratic in spirit. Emerson's struggle is to re-appropriate back to all of humanity its most vital

⁴⁹Dewey, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," 74.

aspects that had been, and continue to be, alienated from it. In his essay on Emerson, Dewey says,

Against creed and system, convention and institution, Emerson stands for restoring to the common man that which in the name of religion, of philosophy, of art and of morality, has been embezzled from the common store and appropriated to sectarian and class use.⁵⁰

Dewey argues that the appropriate human response to a changing and uncertain world must be democratic social organizations. Just as Emerson called for the democratic distribution of human energies stolen for narrow (non-democratic) interests, Dewey calls such a wider distribution "democracy." In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey distinguishes between the actual, immature, democracy of the United States and its ideal, or theoretical, purpose. "In theory, democracy should be a means of stimulating original thought, and of evoking action deliberately adjusted in advance to cope with new forces."⁵¹ The universe of possibility requires that new thought be "stimulated" because there is always yet another "new force" entering in the unstable world. Democratic society, properly understood, is that stimulator of new thought.

In *Democracy and Education* Dewey insists that democracy is the ability to introduce some "change in social habit." Since the world is open and interminably mutable, the form of social organization that is most able to address change through social adaptation must be the only social system that is capable of continuous existence. Dewey insists that it is in democracy that we find that "continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations

⁵⁰Dewey, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," 75.

⁵¹John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: The Modern Library, 1957), 62.

produced by varied intercourse."⁵² Other forms of social organization are, due to their rigidity, less able to cope with change. Whenever social intercourse is limited by law or tradition, society becomes narrow and rigid in its thinking; people become isolated from each other. For Dewey, the reduction in social interaction necessarily entails "rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals within the group."⁵³ Put even more forcefully Dewey insists that

Society is strong, forceful, stable against accident only when all its members can function to the limit of their capacity. Such functioning cannot be achieved without allowing a leeway of experimentation beyond the limits of established and sanctioned custom.⁵⁴

It must be remembered that Dewey does not equate democracy with any form of government. Rather, democracy is free and wide-ranging social relations for common ends. Dewey says that democracy "signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life."⁵⁵ Further, he calls democracy "but a name for the fact that human nature is developed

⁵²Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 86-7.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁴Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 208. Of course, Dewey argues for democratic social arrangements on moral grounds as well, but such an argument is in addition to his argument from efficiency.

⁵⁵John Dewey, "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us" in *John Dewey and the Promise of America*, Progressive Education Booklet no. 14 (Columbus, Ohio: American Education Press, 1939); reprinted in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953, vol. 14: 1939-1941*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 226.

only when its elements take part in directing things which are common. . . ."56

In the deepest analysis, perhaps, all that can be said of the bedrock foundations of democracy is that they are certain kinds of attitudes. Dewey says that his faith in democracy can be nothing other than his "faith in the capacity of the intelligence of the common man to respond with commonsense to the free play of facts and ideas which are secured by effective guarantees of free inquiry, free assembly and free communication"57 Thus democracy can exist only where people share an attitude of faith in the overall benefit of unconstrained inquiry, assembly and communication. Where these attitudes do not exist neither does democracy, despite whatever governmental forms may surround these people. These attitudes can be taught only in a society that values and thus exhibits them in the civil life. Teachers, parents, citizens must live these attitudes in order that children may too come to live them too.

Dewey's Critique of Lockean Liberalism

Dewey understands that there can be no concrete distinction between freedom and democracy. Democratic social relations are freedom, and freedom is democratic social relations. This identity will be explored shortly. Dewey could develop this idea only after having understood the inadequacy of the Lockean liberal tradition. Thus it is useful to explore Dewey's rejection

⁵⁶Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 209.

⁵⁷Dewey, "Creative Democracy," 227.

of Lockean liberalism, just as it was useful to delineate Emerson's and Thoreau's rejection of that same tradition.

Dewey has an explicit critique of Lockean liberal freedom. He begins by saying that the problem with the classical notion of liberalism, i.e., Lockean liberalism, has nothing to do with the categories of individual and society. Rather,

The real fallacy lies in the notion that individuals have such a native or original endowment of rights, powers, and wants that all that is required on the side of institutions and laws is to eliminate the obstructions they offer to the 'free' play of the natural equipment of individuals.⁵⁸

Objecting to the fundamental presumptions of Lockean liberalism, Dewey proceeds to investigate how Lockean liberalism developed. He understands that as the economic basis of Europe moved away from feudalism toward capitalism, laws that codified and protected feudal economic relations failed to change as rapidly as actual economic circumstances. The still feudal laws of Europe hindered the development of capitalism by continuing to protect feudal interests long after these interests were no longer the unchallenged leaders of economic production. In many of his books Dewey states that beliefs and ideals typically lag behind actual conditions, thus the majority of people lack adequate intellectual tools to understand the conditions of their own existence. Dewey gives the following example with regard to the Americans of his own time.

⁵⁸John Dewey, "Philosophies of Freedom," in *Freedom and the Modern World*, ed. Horace Kallen (New York: Coward-McCann, 1928); reprinted in *John Dewey The Later Works, 1925-1928, vol. 3, 1927-1928*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 100.

The beliefs and ideals that are uppermost in their consciousness are not relevant to the society in which they outwardly act and which constantly reacts upon them. Their conscious ideas and standards are inherited from an age that has passed away; their minds, as far as consciously entertained principles and methods of interpretation are concerned, are at odds with actual conditions. This profound split is the cause of distraction and bewilderment.⁵⁹

This condition of retarded ideas must not be construed as merely the unfortunate necessity of human inadequacy. Rather, Dewey understands this discontinuity between ideas and life as the result of inadequately developed social relations, or, to put it more boldly, as the lack of democratic social relations that would nurture basic human relations and communications. Democratic society could produce ideas more suitable for contemporary life. In a society wherein democracy flourishes, there is both the unhindered communication of ideas and the concrete testing of those ideas. Democracy is the opportunity for ideas to catch-up with life.

With regard specifically to the Lockean liberal notion of freedom, Dewey understands it as the result of a specific set of social and historical conditions peculiar to Locke's era—the uneasy transition from feudalism to capitalism. But not all classes were equally affected during this transition. "The class that was most conscious of suffering from restrictions, most active in removing them, and best organized to fight against them consisted of those

⁵⁹ John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1930), 70. For another example of this analysis of the disjunction between ideas and reality, see John Dewey, *Ethics in John Dewey The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 7, 1932, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 268, 276.

who were engaged in manufacturing industries and in commerce."⁶⁰ What was so difficult for the bourgeoisie to tolerate was a "mass of regulations and customs, formed to large degree in feudal times, that hampered and checked the expression of these new [economic] energies." These regulations did not merely inhibit the growth of capitalism. Moreover, those who held political power at the time were mostly "landlords, representing older agrarian habits of belief and action."⁶¹ The bourgeoisie identified government solely with feudal interests. This limited and mistaken conception of government lead bourgeois reformers to a desperate, yet ultimately successful, strategy: the vilification of government itself.

The new bourgeoisie viewed the government itself as essentially antithetical to the rights of individual men because the power of government was concentrated in the hands of the nobles who embodied feudal rather than bourgeois interests. The bourgeoisie justified itself and its own grasping for power upon the postulation of a set of innate and god-given human rights that were antecedent to all governmental and social relations. By arguing that all social relations were derived from and therefore dependent upon the original individual status of humanity, the bourgeoisie could argue that only those social relations deliberately acceded to were legitimate—thus no government had any necessary legitimacy.

⁶⁰John Dewey, "The Meaning of Liberalism," in *John Dewey The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 11: 1935-1937, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 365. For Dewey's most complete account of the historical development of Lockean liberalism see Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, Part 1, "The History of Liberalism" in the same volume, 5-22.

⁶¹Dewey, "The Meaning of Liberalism," 365.

Dewey understands that the founders of the United States were drawn to Lockean ideas because of their power to justify the American Revolution. He says that the Lockean liberal claim as to the existence and priority of a set of "non-political rights inherent in the very structure of the individual" functioned to support the bourgeois claim of the right to revolution. "The American revolution was a rebellion against an established government, and it naturally borrowed and expanded these ideas as the ideological interpretation of the effort to obtain independence of the colonies."⁶²

The great mistake of this liberal tradition and of most subsequent political thinkers has been (according to Dewey) to view these assertions of liberalism as grounded in eternal and absolute truths of human nature rather than as the temporal, socio-historically determined, and expedient proclamations of particular human interests.⁶³ The results of Lockean liberalism are plain to see in the United States, Dewey believed. The antipathy between the individual and society, the mistrust of government, and the understanding of individuality as radical autonomy are the deepest results. In addition, Dewey condemns Lockean liberalism because "It has resulted in identifying the power and liberty of the individual with ability to achieve economic success—or, to put it in a nutshell, with ability to make money."⁶⁴ Here Dewey must not be misunderstood; he does not condemn the American and various other bourgeois revolutions. On the contrary, Dewey sees them as necessary and even heroic efforts on the path to freedom. However, Dewey insists that these revolutions against monarchical

⁶²Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 87.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 145.

⁶⁴Dewey, "The Meaning of Liberalism," 366.

government in favor of individual and bourgeois rights must be seen as particular responses to particular socio-historical conditions, rather than as proclamations of immutable truth. As the particular conditions of any society change, there will be a commensurate need for further change in governmental and other forms of social relation. Thus, just as society is itself dynamic, Dewey requires that forms of social relations be equally dynamic. Lockean liberalism, rooted in its presumptions of an immutable human nature, is static and, therefore, cannot adequately respond to current or future conditions.

Dewey Understands that Freedom is Power

Dewey explicitly repudiates the Lockean liberal contention that freedom is the natural estate of humanity, that it is innate or god-given. If freedom were the natural estate of humanity, then the problem of freedom would be as Locke claimed it to be: the presence of restraints in the form of laws and civil regulations. Lockean liberalism contends that once these external restraints on freedom are eliminated, freedom comes into full flower. In his most concise expression of his understanding of freedom, Dewey rejects the equation of freedom with the absence of external constraints.

There can be no greater mistake, however, than to treat such freedom [the absence of external constraints] as an end in itself. It tends to be destructive of the shared cooperative activities which are the normal source of order. But, on the other hand, it turns freedom which should be positive into something negative.⁶⁵

⁶⁵John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, The Kappa Delta Phi Lecture Series (New York: Collier, 1963), 63.

It is not that Dewey sees no use for the removal of those regulations that limit freedom; he considers their removal a vital step. Dewey's concern is that the removal of external constraints should not be considered, as it typically is by Lockean liberalism, to be the sufficient condition for the full fruition of freedom. Much more is required. Continuing the last quotation, Dewey says that freedom is power.

For freedom from restriction, the negative side, is to be prized only as a means to a freedom which is power: power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen ends into operation.⁶⁶

Thus, ultimately, Dewey does not deny the whole of Lockean liberalism; he denies the idea's completeness. Lockean liberalism includes only the "negative" side of freedom; that is, the idea of freedom from constraint. It fails to include what for Dewey is central: the positive notion of freedom as power to secure some chosen end.

Dewey understands freedom as active power, not as the mere absence of constraints. The active power of freedom requires active intelligence. "Freedom means essentially the part played by thinking . . . it means intellectual initiative, independence in observation, judicious invention, foresight of consequences, and ingenuity of adaptation to them."⁶⁷ Elsewhere Dewey says that "Intelligence is the key to freedom in act."⁶⁸ Exactly what Dewey means by "intelligence" is rather complex, but the two most vital

⁶⁶Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 63-4.

⁶⁷Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 302.

⁶⁸Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 274.

aspects of intelligence are the ability to foresee, in the mind, various possible actions and then the consequences of those actions. Dewey says that intelligence is a complex process that is "trained power of judgment in choosing and forming means and ends in all the situations that life presents."⁶⁹ The proper, i.e., intelligent, criterion for judging and choosing means and ends is consequence. Dewey warns that the "retention" of intelligence "requires constant alertness in observing consequences."⁷⁰ If people fail to understand or to take into account the possible consequences of their actions, those actions cannot be intelligent and, therefore, are not free actions. The satisfaction of even simple desires requires that any desiring agent be able to foresee that some fairly specific action will lead to attaining that desire. Otherwise action becomes random and beyond human control. The person with the greatest intelligence is capable of the greatest freedom, according to Dewey. If a person employs intelligence in the choosing and fulfilling of desires, that person is substantially more free than is the person who either cannot or will not use intelligence in the choosing and attaining of desires. Dewey sums up this thought: "To foresee future objective alternatives and to be able by deliberation to choose one of them and thereby

⁶⁹John Dewey, "The Determination of Ultimate Values or Aims Through Antecedent or A Priori Speculation or Through Pragmatic or Empirical Inquiry," *Thirty-Seventh Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, ed. Guy Montrose Whipple, pt. 2, *The Scientific Movement in Education* (Bloomington, Illinois: Public School Publishing Co., 1938); reprinted in *John Dewey, The Later Works*, vol. 13: 1938-1939, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 267.

⁷⁰Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 97.

weight its chances in the struggle for future existence, measures our freedom."⁷¹

Returning to the epigraph that begins this chapter, Dewey asserts that "Freedom is the 'truth of necessity' only when we use one 'necessity' to alter another. When we use the law to foresee consequences and to consider how they may be averted or secured, then freedom begins."⁷² Dewey explains this sense of freedom by using doctors and engineers as models. He claims that the engineer is "free" to build a bridge over a gorge because of his/her intelligence concerning the laws of building bridges. The engineer is free because he or she uses intelligence (or knowledge of consequences that are based in physical laws) to build bridges. Those who lack such knowledge and yet attempt to span a gorge will fail at the task and thus cannot be considered free. The medical doctor is "free" to execute a cure of sick people only because of the doctor's intelligence about the "laws" or "necessities" of human physiology and pharmacology. Neither the doctor nor the engineer function outside of "necessity," but firmly within it. They take advantage of the intelligent use of necessity to effect their goals. The doctor who ignores the "necessities" of human physiology and the engineer who ignores the "laws" of mechanics cannot succeed; they are not free to effect the desired change unless they work within the confines of necessity.

Emerson says almost the same thing. People must use the laws of nature, "necessity," or "fate" to engage in the world as free people. Emerson asserts that "Reason" is the key to freedom. He says that "the revelation of

⁷¹Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 285.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 286.

Thought takes man out of servitude into freedom."⁷³ It is because one understands the workings of the natural world that it becomes possible to employ the laws of nature for desired ends. Remember that Emerson knows that "freedom is necessity." This it is not servile submission to necessity but the thoughtful connection to necessity that allows one to intervene with one necessity in the place of another.

"So far as a man thinks, he is free."⁷⁴ Emerson understands that freedom is the intervention in the workings of nature and is possible just to the extent that its workings are understood.

Education for Freedom

For Dewey, freedom and democracy are inextricably linked. In fact, a distinction between the two can be made only in abstraction. Democracy is the concrete social relations that are freedom. We already have noted that Dewey argues for the necessity of democracy on the basis of his ontological and epistemological understanding of the world. It is time to explain the role of education in freedom.

Put quite bluntly, Dewey understands that democracy is education for freedom as well as the outcome of such an education. Democracy is incapable of stasis; it is a process of constant and intelligent adaptation. This is why Dewey insists that only democracy is appropriate for the unstable world in which human life exists. An education appropriate for this

⁷³Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate," in *Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Reginald Cook (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1950), 267.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 266.

mutable world must itself be readily open to change; education in any sort of eternal values or ideals is itself anti-democratic and not conducive to freedom. Education for freedom must be flexible. Thus Dewey claims that education for freedom must concern "understanding" rather than "knowledge." By "understanding" Dewey implies the active application of knowledge to useful and desired ends. By "knowledge" Dewey implies dead ideas, isolated from human life.⁷⁵ Dewey illustrates this distinction.

But the crucial question is the extent to which the material of the social studies, whether economics or politics or history or sociology, whatever it may be, is taught simply as information about present society or is taught in connection with things that are done, that need to be done, and how to do them.⁷⁶

Dewey is here arguing for the connection of school studies to real life. Schools must be a place of active participation for young people.

Here Dewey is trying to connect ends with their appropriate means. If a nation values democratic ends, only democratic means may be used to achieve those ends. Schools must teach the social sciences, and other subject matter, such that students obtain an understanding of how to profitably and democratically change the objective conditions of their lives. Here, this power to change objective conditions is freedom. For educators to claim a value in democracy and then to attempt to impart that value to students through anything other than democratic means is hypocrisy, or ignorance. Dewey asserts with all of the stress he can muster that "The

⁷⁵John Dewey, "The Challenge of Democracy to Education," *Progressive Education* 14 (Feb. 1937); reprinted in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1923-1953, vol. 11: 1935-1937*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 184.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 185.

fundamental principle of democracy is that the ends of freedom and individuality for all can be attained only by means that accord with those ends."⁷⁷

Dewey insists that "every individual becomes educated only as he has an opportunity to contribute something from his own experience . . . and finally that enlightenment comes from the give and take, from the exchange of experiences and ideas."⁷⁸ The place that maximizes the opportunity to contribute and be involved in give and take is called democracy. In a phrase that could hardly be clearer or more concise, Dewey says that "democratic means and the attainment of democratic ends are one and inseparable."⁷⁹ Democracy cannot be taught through authoritarian means. Thus education for freedom must employ democratic means; the schools must be made democratic if young people are to be educated for freedom. Democratic education allows and encourages students to participate directly in their own education. Students must have the opportunity for active participation, planning, and adapting their education.

What would such democratic participation look like? "To my mind, the greatest mistake that we can make about democracy is to conceive of it as something fixed, fixed in idea and fixed in its outward manifestation." It is

⁷⁷John Dewey, "Democracy is Radical," *Common Sense* 6 (Jan. 1937); reprinted in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953, vol. 11: 1935-1937*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 298. Italics in the original.

⁷⁸John Dewey, "Democracy and Education in the World Today" (New York: Society for Ethical Culture, 1938); reprinted in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953, vol. 13: 1938-1939*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 296.

⁷⁹Dewey, "Democracy is Radical," 299.

something so variable that it must be in constant flux. "The very idea of democracy, the meaning of democracy, must be continually explored afresh; it has to be constantly discovered, and rediscovered, remade and reorganized. . . ." ⁸⁰ There is no universal ideal. For instance, one must not expect that a primarily agrarian democratic society would resemble a post-industrial democratic society.

Nonetheless, Dewey's understands that education for freedom has certain general qualities:

1. Educational opportunity must be equally distributed to all persons, and education must not, in actual practice, be differentially distributed on the basis of race, gender, age, economic status, IQ, or other unsound bases. Any system of separate education for elites and masses is anti-democratic. It limits the scope of possible interaction between peoples; it limits their "shared undertakings and experiences," ⁸¹ which are by Dewey's definition "democracy" itself. The separation of educational opportunities on the basis of social and economic distinctions fixes identities and limits human interactions, and thus is inimical to freedom. It is inimical to freedom because it hinders the possibilities of human interaction, is inflexible, and reduces the actual power of all persons to choose for themselves.

2. Education for freedom must be flexible. When education is reduced to a set agenda mandated by the state, the school board, or any group given authority over education, the essential spontaneity of education is denied. To the extent that educational agendas are not set by teachers and students, there is a tendency to fix in advance an educational experience that, rather, ought to

⁸⁰Dewey, "The Challenge of Democracy to Education," 182.

⁸¹Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 84.

be a "continuous readjustment through the new situations produced by varied intercourse."⁸² Dewey defines democratic society as one in which there are "more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest" and a dynamism that is a "continuous readjustment" of the society based upon these numerous interactions.⁸³ These same qualities of flexibility and variety must be found within the schools if there is to be education for freedom. Inflexible institutions prevent people from undertaking the "continuous readjustments" they consider important for their own lives; inflexible education hinders change, which is a vital aspect of freedom.

3. Education for freedom also requires education in thinking. Dewey insists that freedom consists in "the power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them. . . ."⁸⁴ No one is born wise. In complex social organizations the consequences of actions are often not readily seen; consequences may manifest distant in both time and space from the original action. Therefore, people must be educated in the processes of framing purposes, judging wisely, and foreseeing consequences of actions. Especially in a scientific age, there exist powerful analytic tools that assist in the foreseeing of consequences. Scientific studies demonstrate that smoking causes cancer, that obesity leads to cardiac illness and death, that drunk driving vastly increases the probability of vehicle collisions. These consequences of human actions are foreseen with a scientific certainty that was not possible only a few decades ago. This same scientific method has also begun to inform the social sciences, something

⁸²Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 86-7.

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 64.

Dewey thought necessary for the benefit of society. We know many of the social costs of poverty, inadequate education, and drug addiction; we know that community can be built through social interaction. These too are legitimate issues for educators to address, so that students come to foresee both the larger social and the more personal consequences of their actions.

But Dewey is not satisfied that people will be free when they begin to think through to the consequences of their actions. Education for freedom must insure that the application of intelligence to actions becomes habitual. When people automatically engage in the consideration of various alternatives and their consequences rather than act impulsively, they will maximize their freedom. This "habituation" to thoughtfulness cannot be imposed, and neither is it a mechanical habituation like, perhaps, a method of tying one's shoes. Dewey knows that "the formation of habits is a purely mechanical thing unless habits are also *tastes*—habitual modes of preference and esteem, an effective sense of excellence."⁸⁵ Education for freedom succeeds when students develop the "taste" for thinking that is based upon their own experience of the superior outcomes available to them through the use of thought. Once students become fully aware of the power of their thinking to help them in choosing and accomplishing their own ends, the process of thinking becomes automatic—they develop a taste for it based on beneficial past results.

Freedom is not a thing to be possessed, according to Dewey. Freedom is more a way of living one's life. This way of life becomes real when the objective and subjective conditions of life encourage freedom. Schools that educate students in freedom are places where these conditions exist. "If

⁸⁵Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 235.

attention is centered upon the conditions which have to be met in order to secure a situation favorable to effective thinking, freedom will take care of itself."⁸⁶

We may sum up Dewey's notion of education for freedom by saying that it provides the following conditions. It is flexible to accommodate student interests and needs, equal in quality and quantity across the various social distinctions of class, race, gender, and so on, and that it leads students to a pervasive acquired taste for thinking. This thinking manifests itself primarily in the active provisioning of alternative possibilities and the scientific consideration of the outcomes of possible actions.

Transcendental Vision and Dewey

If there is a critique of Dewey's conception of freedom from a Transcendental perspective it is that Dewey is too concrete and thereby loses the ability to inspire. By reducing the scope of his vision to this world alone, Dewey preaches a hard message, perhaps one unsuited to most people. There is no redemption save the redemption available in this world and within one's own life. Transcendentalism offers an alternative to the world: a transcendent, even godly, realm. There is an eternal ideal toward which humankind ought rightly to aspire. Transcendentalism is consoling; pragmatism is challenging. Is there a synthesis possible between the two? Perhaps it can be found in the work of Maxine Greene, which is the topic of the next chapter.

⁸⁶Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 304.

CHAPTER EIGHT
MAXINE GREENE AND THE RECOVERY OF AN
EX-STATIC VISION

It may sound paradoxical to say that the lived world can be illuminated and enlarged through engagements with imaginary worlds. And yet, if we are to deal with literary works as works of art, we must recognize that they create alternative realities—what some have called “possible worlds.” They are worlds that can only be entered by persons willing to break with the ordinary and the mundane.

—Maxine Greene, “Language, Literature, and the Release of Meaning”

Emerson and Thoreau share a vision that is ex-static: a vision that breaks with the ordinary and throws one outside of oneself toward that which does not yet exist. In the early twentieth century, philosophy was asked to become increasingly scientific. John Dewey does much that appealed to this twentieth century need for science. His vision is not oriented toward the spiritual but toward the worldly. Dewey appealed to an America that had separated its need for the spiritual from its need for the worldly. More recently an attempt has been made to combine something of Dewey’s rigorous science with the Transcendental need for an ecstatic vision. By joining Dewey’s understanding of freedom as power with the transcendent vision of French existentialism (usually as manifest in literature), Maxine Greene attempts to restore a genuine ecstatic vision to American philosophy. Greene claims that it is the role of philosophy to

provide an ecstatic vision; philosophy is to include the examination of particular visions, to seek them out, to train people to see farther into the realm of the possible. It is in her readiness to insist, again and again, that ecstatic vision is an integral part of philosophy and that specificity of transcendent vision is vital as well, that she brings herself into alignment with Thoreau and Emerson.

This ecstatic vision of a society in which a developed sense of freedom exists could function as a powerful antidote to the prevalent Lockean liberalism. Because popular American culture of the twentieth century has developed a particularly powerful propaganda that sells the ideal of Lockean autonomy, wherein freedom is merely presumed rather than exercised, the need for a powerful ecstatic vision to counter such propaganda becomes all the more necessary. In the nineteenth century, though Americans were much influenced by the Lockean liberal ideal of freedom as autonomy, they still, in large part, lived their lives outside the vacuum of this ideal. They lived in tightly knit communities in which communal activities flourished and within which people found their identities. In the late twentieth century this community no longer exists for most Americans, and lives are lived more fully within the Lockean liberal ideal of freedom as radical autonomy. Without a powerful ecstatic vision to throw people out of this autonomy and back into some functioning community, it seems unlikely that any adequate freedom could be reconstructed.

Creative Philosophy and The Critique of Dewey

For Greene, philosophy involves the construction of meanings. "To do philosophy, as Jean-Paul Sartre says, is to develop a fundamental project, to go beyond the situations one confronts and refuse reality as given in the name of a

reality to be produced."¹ Philosophy is not merely analytic; it must also create, construct, and synthesize. In order to build, there must be a vision of what is to be built.

To be the active constructors of a "life-world," people must have the vision to do so. Here Greene's concept of freedom becomes critical. What does it mean to have freedom and how does one become free? She understands freedom as the capacity to surpass the given; it is a communal pursuit; it functions to open spaces and perspectives on the world. It is all of this. Freedom is not an abstract claim; it is not a natural right; it is not an abstract ideal.² Quoting Dewey, Greene says that people are free "not because of what we statically are, but in so far as we are becoming different from what we have been."³ She then goes on to explain that

to become different, of course, is not simply to will oneself to change. There is the question of being able to accomplish what one chooses to do. It is not only a matter of the capacity to choose; it is a matter of the power to act to attain one's purposes.⁴

This all sounds very much like Dewey, but Greene feels the need to provide something more. This freedom as change and as power to attain purposes also requires an ecstatic vision. By employing much of the ontological

¹Maxine Greene, *Teacher As Stranger: Educational Philosophy for the Modern Age* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1973), 7.

²Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 79-80. This, in a nutshell, is Greene's critique of Locke's idea of freedom. She understands that freedom cannot be a natural human quality and that it requires development. Her critique of Lockean freedom is largely taken from Dewey.

³John Dewey, quoted in Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 3.

⁴Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 3-4.

foundation of French existential phenomenology, particularly that of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and by employing the concrete example of the arts, particularly literature, Greene attempts to synthesize a philosophy that is both grounded and transcendent. Though Greene does not develop a specific critique of Dewey, the fact that she finds the need to go outside of his work into Existentialism and literature is an implicit critique.

Dewey does not appear to believe that it is a necessary function of philosophy to provide a specific transcendent vision. He states that freedom involves going beyond the current situation into something else. But what else? Dewey provides some general criteria for any future social organization. He sees the need for a "faith in the capacity of the intelligence of the common man;" he calls for a "freeplay of facts and ideas;" he claims that people must value "free inquiry, free assembly and free communication."⁵ But, Dewey deliberately stops short of developing any specific social model because he feels strongly that such development is not the role of philosophy. Dewey says that "the prime function of philosophy is that of rationalizing the *possibilities* of experience, especially collective human experience."⁶ It is the responsibility of the larger community to decide on the direction of that community; philosophy helps us think through the various possibilities. Dewey refuses to spoil that work by claiming that any specific ends are preferable to any others. Though he does provide a general frame for human ends, what is missing is a particular transcendent vision.

⁵John Dewey, "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us," in *John Dewey and the Promise of America*, Progressive Education Booklet no. 14 (Columbus, Ohio: American Education Press, 1939); reprinted in *John Dewey, The Latter Works, 1925-1953, vol. 14: 1939-1941*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 226.

⁶John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, enlarged edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 122.

Dewey says, "In quality, the good is never twice alike. It never copies itself."⁷ Democratic social relations have no universal form. "There is no sanctity in universal suffrage, frequent elections, majority rule, congressional and cabinet government."⁸ All these forms of democratic organization that most Americans hold so dear have no overriding appeal to Dewey. He values these institutions only to the extent that they accomplish the ends of freedom. Dewey feels the need to work beneath the level of political structures, on the level of the "public" itself. He asks, how the public might function democratically. He responds to this question by addressing the requirements of the "democratic idea in its generic social sense." Again and again Dewey refuses to supply any particular vision and, rather, provides only a general and diffuse vision. Dewey says of the "generic idea of democracy" that

From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interest and goods which are common.⁹

This is not a vision with the inspiring force of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*! Rather, what Dewey provides is a set of abstract and general conditions for democratic freedom. He claims that a truly democratic society must have "freedom of social

⁷John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Modern Library, 1957), 197.

⁸John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1927), 144-5.

⁹*Ibid.*, 147.

inquiry and of distribution of its conclusions."¹⁰ It is not a general vision of "generic" democracy that is missing in Dewey; it is a precise and inspiring vision that fills the mind and lights desire.

Greene finds transcendent (or ecstatic) vision particularly well-developed in literature. The novel is, by its nature, a transcendent vision. As a broadly developed work of fiction, the novel is an exploration of the potential of human life within a social organization that does not actually exist. Further, unlike drawing, painting, and sculpture, the novel exists only within a temporal extension. It cannot be grasped in a moment. The novel is necessarily about change, about life within a set of temporal and mutable circumstances. The novel necessarily concerns freedom in that the novel is always about people (or some character symbolic of people) within the active context of life. Characters must choose. The consequences of actions are often only poorly known; still people (as real people and as characters in books) must choose and must act. Then the consequences of those actions must be borne.

Existential Ontology and Literature

Greene employs much from Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's ontologies. It may be useful to examine Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in order to fully understand Greene's idea of transcendence. Sartre insists that people "are always outside of themselves toward. . . ."¹¹ (Sartre himself provides the ellipsis.) That is, Sartre

¹⁰Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 166.

¹¹Jean-Paul Sartre, *Question de Méthode*, in *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1960), 95.

insists that the essential feature of humanity is continual transcendence of current conditions toward some other state. To be human is to be in a perpetual state of disequilibrium and “ex-stasis” (literally, standing outside of oneself).

However, Sartre’s ontology divides the world into two radically distinct substances: being-in-itself (or things) and being-for-itself (or human consciousness). This being-for-itself is a nothingness; it is a break or hole in being-in-itself that moves constantly toward being-in-itself without ever being filled. Consciousness is for Sartre an activity of transcendence but negatively put. Consciousness is a lack that in an ever moving transcendence seeks its fulfillment without ever finding it. The defining feature of humanity is for Sartre this insatiable transcendence, and this transcendence is identical with freedom for Sartre.¹²

Merleau-Ponty agrees that the defining aspect of human beings is their transcendence. However, the side of consciousness (or being-for-itself) is not empty, not a nothing. Rather, it is the complement and completion of the world. This, I think, is why, when Greene moves to the level of ontology, she refers more often to Merleau-Ponty than to Sartre. Merleau-Ponty explains his connectedness to the world in a manner that Emerson and Thoreau would surely understand. Merleau-Ponty says,

As I contemplate the blue of the sky, I am not the opposite of it as an acosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought; I do not deploy before it an idea of blue that would give to me the secret of it, [rather] I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery; it “thinks itself within me;” I am

¹²Sartre’s understanding of freedom was very popular in Europe and America in the 1950s through the 1970s. This popularity is not surprising, because Sartrean freedom is understood as the ontological status of human beings, very like Lockean natural, god-given, freedom.

the sky itself as drawn together, collected, and which exists for me; my consciousness is engorged by this unlimited blue.¹³

As people make sense of the world, they may come to realize the extent of their own potential influence in that process of sense-making. Greene compares Merleau-Ponty's idea of transcendence with Robert Frost's. Merleau-Ponty says of a human life that it is "a route, an experience which gradually clarifies itself, which gradually rectifies itself and proceeds by dialogue with itself and with others."¹⁴ Greene reflects on this line of Merleau-Ponty's. She says, "I think of Frost writing, 'Two roads diverged from where I stood.' They disappear, you recall, in the distance; we choose one knowing that its reality is contingent on our perception at the moment, on the way the road present itself to us."¹⁵ Such common experiences as choosing one path rather than another can be a moment in which people come to realize something of their transcendence and the extent to which choice makes a difference in their lives. But frequently a more obvious instance of choice must be constructed for didactic purposes. Greene insists that Frost's poems (and certainly various other works of literature) can make the process and importance of choice more real in the lives of young people. Greene says, "I recall Merleau-Ponty writing that 'choice and action alone cut us loose from anchorage.'"¹⁶ It is that shock of the new that comes about through

¹³Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie*, 248; *Phenomenology*, 214.

¹⁴Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception," in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, trans. and ed. James Edie (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 21.

¹⁵Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 75.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 109-110.

deliberate choice that Greene values. People must become accustomed to cutting themselves away from their secure "anchorage" if they are to live their freedom. It is in literature that Greene sees the myriad of characters in transcendence, making choices that change their lives.

Freedom and the Ex-Static Vision: The Arts and History

There are difficulties in becoming free. The achievement of freedom is largely dependent on the perspectives available to and the choices made by the freedom seeker. Greene warns of the mystifications that distort perspectives. "What is taken to be reflectiveness or insight or foresight may—because of ignorance or fixation—lead to self-deception . . . [or] suicide."¹⁷ Greene relates how Henry James attributed women's failure in the search for freedom to their own failure to develop their faculties of perception and intelligence. Greene then counterposes Edith Wharton's fictional women for whom "the weight of determining forces is made to appear too heavy to resist, no matter what the degree of insight or understanding;" one such fictional woman even comes to see freedom as mere "indulgence."¹⁸ All of these women, Greene implies, are crushed by the "mystification" of social reality that tells them they cannot resist, that they are not free to intervene in the making of their own reality.

Surely, it would have made a difference if . . . [these fictional women] came to realize that what they took for granted as "natural" and inexorable was a human construction, susceptible to reinterpretation and change. It would have made a difference if they could reconstitute their own internalized vision of themselves. . . . [These women needed] the

¹⁷Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 80.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 81.

realization that freedom can be achieved only in an ongoing transaction, one that is visible and legible to those involved.¹⁹

In addressing the problem of "mystification," and how people can work to de-mystify their lives, Greene points to the centrality of both art and history. The arts are for Greene the prime didactic tools for bringing the awareness of possibility and freedom to people. History is the ground of contention between those who would extend the mystifications of life and those who would overcome those mysteries and, thereby, find their own freedom.

Contact With the Work of Art

Greene agrees with the contemporary radical-left social philosopher Herbert Marcuse who says that "art is committed to that perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society."²⁰ This form of "alienation" is not negative, though it may be painful. To be so alienated is to begin to see beyond one's merely functional role in society. It is to make one's life problematic and thus require reflection. Greene says that Marcuse "was pointing to an emancipatory possibility of relevance for an education in and for freedom."²¹ She is wise enough to know that art alone cannot make freedom real in our lives. Yet it has a vital function to play in coming to freedom. "The arts will help open the situations that require

¹⁹Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 83.

²⁰Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 9; quoted in Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 132.

²¹Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 133.

interpretation, will help disrupt the walls that obscure the spaces, the spheres of freedom to which educators might some day attend."²² Thus Greene sees encounters with the arts (most usually but not exclusively literature) as powerful forces capable of rending facile presumptions of security and stability. The teacher is to help the student make this contact with the work of art, and this contact can "awaken" the student. Once the students begin to see that things are not always what they appear to be, they may "become empowered to engage in some sort of *praxis*, engaged enough to name the obstacles in the way of their shared becoming."²³ This rather existential way of writing can be more concretely understood as a process in which the student upon contact with art may develop the ability (power) to engage in "praxis" (reflective action) so as to identify the obstacles to freedom and work with others to overcome them.

Greene sees two vital functions for literature within the project of education for freedom. First, literature can provide a shocking or upsetting experience. That is, literature can function for its reader as a window into an experience that is lived from within a radically different perspective. This new perspective functions like a slap in the face; it is a challenge. Second, as literature provides a new vision into the workings of the world it can show positive or desirable models. Literature can provide a sense that there are positive alternatives in the world. The ecstatic vision found in literature can shock and then guide.

Greene focuses on the vital role that literature can play in the initial steps of the process of becoming free. By presenting a world alien to the student in art,

²²Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 133.

²³*Ibid.*

one requiring of the student the action of "being-made-sense-of," Greene believes that something of the certainty and security of the student is broken down.

It seems clear enough that interpretive encounters with literature can, at least to some degree, lead to clarification of modern readers' lives. Turning our attention to our own life . . . we ought—by coming in touch with a range of adversary artists—to find ourselves breaking with submergence, posing our own critical questions to reality.²⁴

One of the works of art that Greene uses in her classes is Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. "This novel, like so many others, speaks on many levels and in many voices, but it confronts readers (if they allow it to) with questions that ought to be inescapable for practicing teachers."²⁵ One of the many questions that confront the reader is the contradiction inherent in a slave economy. Another question is about the conflicts of nature and culture, as represented in the book by the river and riverbanks respectively. But how does the confronting of these issues by the student break down the understandings of the world held by the student? Greene claims, quite simply, that the mere raising of these questions can function to make the student's world problematic. "Encounters with literature, in part because they become encounters with other consciousnesses, are apt to provoke such questions."²⁶ The questioning then instigates the reconfiguration of the students' understanding of the world so that it again makes sense. But this new sense is likely to be different from the one

²⁴Maxine Greene, "The Rational and the Emancipatory: Towards a Role for Imaginative Literature," in *Landscapes of Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 38.

²⁵Maxine Greene, "Qualitative Research and the Uses of Literature," in *Qualitative Research in Education: Focus and Methods*, ed. Robert R. Sherman and Rodman B. Webb (Philadelphia: Falmer, 1988), 179.

²⁶*Ibid.*

held previously. The questions raised often are not answerable from within the previous perspective; often these kinds of questions cannot even exist as questions within the old perspective. For example, within the mainstream of modern American culture, "freedom" actively resists becoming problematic. Within America's Lockean liberal tradition, freedom already is a part of what it means to be an American. Only from the outside (from a new perspective) can freedom become problematic.

Once the upsetting experience of the work of literature has been had, one may proceed to change. That is, one may try to reconstruct one's world. And to do that, one must choose a new world to build and find the power to build it. Here we find two ideas central to Greene's work: the existential notion of the project, or the possible, and the importance of community. It is only in the ability to conceive of an alternate world (a not-yet, a world as possibility) which in time may become a reality that one can be said to be free. "It is only when persons experience themselves as taking risks, embarking on new beginnings, that the predictable gives way to the possible."²⁷ But this change must not be merely an internal and individual change; change does not occur within a vacuum. Greene recognizes that the search for freedom goes on within a "matrix of social, economic, cultural and psychological conditions."²⁸ The realization of the possible must be within some larger social realm or community.

Greene recognizes that freedom is essential to what it means to be a human being. The challenges to freedom, however, do change. In our modern age, Greene diagnoses the major challenge to freedom to be the increasing mechanization of life. Increasingly all aspects of the world come under the

²⁷Greene, "The Passion of the Possible," 69.

²⁸Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 80.

explanatory power of impersonal mechanical forces.²⁹ Schools provide little opportunity for challenging the power of these forces. Rather, Greene claims, the schools provide students with only two alternatives: "to submit or to break free, which means going it on their own."³⁰ This "breaking free" is understood in a Lockean sense. It is understood as moving outside of mainstream society and community into some state of nature. Greene knows that literature can be used to enlarge the possible beyond the dichotomy of submission and Lockean freedom. She claims that "it is the literary experience itself, and not the specific content of a given work, that has the potential of confronting us with our own sheer capacity to begin, a capacity that . . . we may have allowed ourselves to forget."³¹ People forget their capacity to begin anew, to reinterpret lives and meanings, because we are so often submerged within a set of "absolute and one-dimensional" views that have been provided by "conventional wisdom" and by some "official spokesman for the culture."³² To engage in imaginative literature is, for Greene, to be confronted with a world of possibilities, a world that cannot be predicted from the beginning, a world in which the subjective (rather than the objective) plays the decisive role.

Greene claims that it is the "literary experience itself, and not the specific content of a given work, that has the potential of confronting us with our sheer

²⁹Maxine Greene, "Steamboats and Critiques," in *Landscapes of Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 113.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 114.

³¹Maxine Greene, "Exploring Imaginary Realities: New Perspectives on the 'Real'" *Educational Studies* 12 (1981), 186.

³²Greene, "Steamboats and Critiques," 116.

capacity to begin. . . .³³ Helping people to find this "sheer capacity" does not require that any particular work of art or literature be used. Greene claims that the "literary experience itself" is sufficient. Yet, repeatedly, Greene makes reference not to ordinary works of fiction or to television sitcoms. She refers continually to great works of literature and uses classic works of literature in her own teaching. Though the most disreputable works of fiction on television and in comic books may be sufficient to help people understand something of their own ability to begin anew, Greene has a larger agenda. She is not merely concerned that people recognize in themselves the ability to begin anew. People must also move in the direction of building a more democratic society. Thus Greene employs not the television sitcoms but great literature. Greene uses literature not merely to teach people that it is possible to "begin anew." She uses literature to provide a vision of how the basic principles of democratic society can function in the lives of students. She claims that

The principles of equality, justice, freedom, and so on that we associate with democracy cannot be decontextualized if they are to be significant. They have to be understood and realized within the transactions and interchanges of community life. Moreover, they have to be *chosen* by living individuals in the light of the individuals' shared life with others. Therefore, an important dimension of all education must be the intentional bringing into being of norm-governed situations, situations in which students discover what it is to experience a sense of obligation and responsibility. . . .³⁴

Thus the particular image put forth in the work of literature is important to Greene. It is important not for teaching students about their ability to begin anew, for she says that any work of art can do this. However, as a teacher who values democratic social organization, Greene sees the need for the democratic

³³Greene, "Exploring Imaginary Realities," 186.

³⁴Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 66.

vision to be presented as well. She teaches Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* because it can do more than merely demonstrate an alternative possible world; *The Great Gatsby* also shows what it is like to live irresponsibly—without concern for the basics of democratic culture.³⁵ She teaches *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* not merely to help students understand that they can break with their previous course of life and begin anew; she teaches it because this book shows the value of pluralistic dialogue (between Huck and Jim) for the construction of a community of equality. Greene chooses great literature because of its vision of democratic virtues.

Perhaps the most important democratic virtue is the ability to critically assess the forces in one's own life. The forces that actively conspire to withhold new and alien perspectives are ubiquitous in most societies, including our own.

It is not merely the structures of class, race, and gender relations that embody such [restraining] power and make it felt in the classrooms. Much the same can happen through the differential distribution of knowledge, through a breaking of what is distributed into discrete particles, through an unwarranted classification of a "chaos."³⁶

This "chaos" is the belief or assertion that something simply is the case and that as a chaos is not capable of being understood, addressed, or remedied. These forces that resist understanding are precisely those that Greene would have all persons take up critically, make problematic. And, as we have seen, the first step in making the world problematic is the unsettling encounter with art.

³⁵Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 67.

³⁶Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 133.

History and the Re-Visioning of Possibility

New beginnings are always problematic. One's situation is always circumscribed by history. Any freedom in the present often depends on the ability to develop an adequate view of the past as much as of the future. Thus, in large part, taking control of present decisions in order to influence future outcomes requires that the past be re-visioned. Maxine Greene, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and John Locke all understand this necessity very well.

"For all the distinctiveness of the arts, there is a characteristic they share with certain kinds of history." History, as Greene understands it, does not consist of a set of past events that add up, with mechanical necessity, to some universal meaning. Rather, history is about "provisional interpretations of provisionally selected facts, and about the subtle changes that take place through the 'reciprocal action' of interpretation and the ordering of those facts."³⁷ What Greene sees is that the "selecting, shaping, and interpreting" of past events is "not unlike the process of art-making."³⁸ As people come to see their own power in the alternative ordering of events and interpretations in both fiction and history, they may come to find their freedom as active interpreters of the meanings of their own lives. As past events take on new and different meanings, the present must be altered. The active interpretation of history allows the person to "locate himself or herself in an intersubjective reality reaching

³⁷ Maxine Greene, "Toward Wide-Awakeness: An Argument for the Arts and Humanities in Education," *Teachers College Record* 79, no. 1 (September 1977), 121-2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

backwards and forwards in time."³⁹ Deriving much of her understanding of the mutability of history from Merleau-Ponty, Greene insists that history has a continuous influence on the present. History is not merely a past. It is, rather, as Merleau-Ponty insists, "the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future."⁴⁰

This realization that history necessitates a future is used by Locke to foment a radical change in the understanding of freedom and of human nature. Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* is not an abstract claim that human beings are free. Nor is it a plea that persons be allowed their natural freedom. It is a bold re-visioning of history. As has been mentioned already, the *First Treatise* is a argument against Filmer's traditional claim that divine justification for monarchical rule is found in the Bible. In the late seventeenth century the Bible was not merely the supreme religious text of Europe; it was history as well. The stories of Adam and Eve, the Egyptian captivity of the Jews, the birth and death of Jesus were all understood to be historically accurate retellings of actual events. The Bible was thought to be the best source of history available. Filmer used the Bible to support his claim of the divine appointment of earthly rulers and the natural subservience of the masses. So long as Filmer's interpretation of history remained in force, there was no alternative for the masses of Europe. They must either submit to the king or rebel against God.

Much as one might proceed to write a novel, Locke wrote his *First Treatise* as a radical revisioning of history. He offered the world an alternative view of the Bible. Locke's view supported the natural rights of all persons and undermined Filmer's conservative perspective. In just one of a great many

³⁹Ibid., 123.

⁴⁰Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960*, trans. John O'Neill, in *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 109.

possible examples, Locke, in order to better understand the meaning of the ancient Hebrew birthright, re-visioned the biblical story of Esau selling his birthright to his younger brother Jacob. Locke provides biblical evidence that the birthright consisted in a greater share of the inheritance from his father, Isaac, not a right to absolute authority, as Filmer had argued.⁴¹ As people came to understand their history within the frame of Locke's interpretation, they could no longer accept that some tiny minority of persons had been chosen by God to rule over them. The Bible as the re-visioned history of humanity became an active force for a new social direction in Europe and America. As Merleau-Ponty says, each different history demands a different "sequel," a different "future." In re-visioning the past, Locke empowered millions of people to change their present circumstance and thus necessitated a future that broke radically with its direction under the influence of the old history. Thus we must understand that freedom is not merely concerned with the possibility of some choice as to the future. It is concerned with a creative reading, or reinterpreting, of the past. As the past is re-visioned, the present must be re-aligned so as to come into accord with the past. In doing this re-alignment of the present, a future distinct from the one that would have come to pass is made necessary.

Greene sees that same process of re-visioning the past at work in literature. Despite any attempt to write the final history of literature, living writers will continuously alter that history. Borrowing her vision from Jorge Luis Borges, Greene says that Borges found in the work of Robert Browning a "precursor" to Kafka. Borges tells us that

The poem "Fears and Scruples" by Browning foretells Kafka's work, but our reading of Kafka perceptibly sharpens and deflects our reading of the

⁴¹John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, student edition, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), bk. I, § 113-115.

poem. Browning did not read it as we do now. In the critic's vocabulary, the word "precursor" is indispensable, but it should be cleansed of all connotation of polemics or rivalry. The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.⁴²

Thus freedom, as Greene understands it, cannot merely be concerned with some possible future, or even with some choice in the present. Freedom requires that we work to "modify our conceptions of past, present, and future as well."⁴³

Of course, Greene, Merleau-Ponty, and Locke are not alone in their understanding of the centrality of history in the determination of the present and future. George Orwell expressed this idea in *Animal Farm* and fully developed it in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell warns humanity that control of history is the control of the present and future. "All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary."⁴⁴ With the realization of the mutability of history comes also the realization that "Men are infinitely malleable."⁴⁵ We are struck with the threatening realization that the various possible histories could just as easily be employed for enslavement as for the liberation of humanity.

⁴²Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," in *Labyrinths* (New York: New Directions, 1964), 201, quoted in Maxine Greene, "The Rational and the Emancipatory," in *Landscapes of Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 26

⁴³Greene, "The Rational and the Emancipatory," 27.

⁴⁴George Orwell, *Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four": Text, Sources, Criticism*, 2d ed., ed. Irving Howe (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 28.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 179.

Freedom and Community

Greene draws heavily on the work of Dewey in her exposition of the role and nature of community:

When Dewey spoke of the "Great Community," it will be recalled, he spoke of the emergence of an articulate public and of a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive "art of communication" that would take possession of the physical machineries of transmission. When that happens, he said, "Democracy will come into its own, for democracy is the name for a life of free and enriching communion. It had its seer in Walt Whitman. It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication."⁴⁶

Crucial to the idea of a community is communication, the communication of hopes, dreams, and projects. This community of open communication in which each person can be confronted by the thoughts of others is exactly the kind of place a classroom can be. If Maxine Greene presents *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to her students and then engages them in ways that make them see what is problematic both in the book and in their own lives, then she indeed has created a community because she and her students have entered into an open discussion of ideas. This type of community would be called a democracy in that "democracy is the idea of community life itself."⁴⁷ But this is not, and never can be the terminus of our work. For Greene, the true community is one in which communication never stops, never finds completion.

⁴⁶Maxine Greene, "The Passion of the Possible: Choice, Multiplicity, and Commitment," *Journal of Moral Education* 19, no. 2 (1990), 73. Greene is quoting from Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 184.

⁴⁷Greene, "The Passion of the Possible," 73.

Democracy itself is always in the making, always straining beyond toward some end that will never be finally achieved. And, indeed, if we think of democracy and community both in terms of ongoing dialogue and communication, there can be no stopping point, and certainly not if the dialogue is kept open to the long-suppressed voices that have scarcely been heard in public before.⁴⁸

An example of such a community is Huck Finn and Jim on their raft. Greene often refers to Twain's classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. She says that Huck and Jim "enter into a kind of voluntary community for companionship and mutual respect." Most importantly, "it is a relationship that enables each one of them to grow."⁴⁹ It is within their little community on the raft that Huck and Jim move beyond their narrow selves; this community is the space within which each may transcend the limited self. Each moves outside of himself toward a larger sense of self. In existential language, both are shown in "ex-stasis." In the language of Emerson, both find their true humanity in the Oversoul. Jim "sheds his superstitions and his humility; he becomes a type of sage," while Huck "becomes increasingly moral as he learns to regard Jim as a fellow human being."⁵⁰ These changes are not possible in isolation. The human interaction, the community, between Huck and Jim is the ground that nourishes this growth of self.

⁴⁸Greene, "The Passion of the Possible," 73.

⁴⁹Greene, "Steamboats and Critiques," 112.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

Teachers and the Community of Art

Greene repeatedly announces that her work is for teachers. She works to help teachers understand who they are and what they do. Her most powerful analogy for the process of teaching is art. Likening the teacher to the sculptor Rodin, Greene says that the teacher like the artist is

also engaged in transmuting and illuminating material to the end of helping others see afresh. If he is able to think what he is doing while he is vitally present as a person, he may arouse others to act on their own freedom. Learning to learn, some of those persons may move beyond the sheltered places until they stand by their own choice in the high wind of thought.⁵¹

For Greene the successful teacher is an artist, and to understand the nature of teaching we must understand Greene's conception of the nature of art. It is not surprising that she relies on artists (e.g., Mark Twain, Thomas Mann, Herman Melville, Virginia Woolf) and philosophers who have a vital concern for the aesthetic (e.g., Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Dewey) when examining the nature of teaching.

Greene condemns the modern concern with the technical at the expense of the "lived." She makes the point that, recently, teaching has been dominated by a "technical rationality." Within this conception of teaching, the process of teaching is reduced to a "series of instrumental decisions which we try to make more and more rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique."⁵² As Greene sees the act of teaching, it must not be confused with or reduced to "technique." She sees the act of teaching as a continuous creation, as

⁵¹Greene, *Teacher As Stranger*, 298.

⁵²Maxine Greene, "Reflection and Passion in Teaching," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 2, no. 1 (1986), 69.

continuously unique. Each moment of teaching is "an unstable, unpredictable human situation identical to no other in the world."⁵³ Teaching is not a "behavior," but rather, Greene calls it, an "action." The difference is significant. For Greene, "behavior" is something to be isolated and studied in a laboratory; it lends itself to statistical determination and prediction; it is technical and readily circumscribed. "Action" is unpredictable and open; it is free. In short, the modern concern with the science or technique of teaching has overshadowed the lived experience or "art" of teaching. The practice of teaching must continue to be informed by technique, but it can never be reduced to it.

Education as an art cannot guarantee results and like the democratic community finds no final termination. If the instructional process is continually evolving and unique, then, as with the work of art, success is never certain. As one begins to engage with an unfamiliar work of art, there is an encompassing uncertainty. The artist cannot guarantee that the work of art will say anything to those who take up the challenge of the art. The teacher too, is uncertain of success in education. The teacher can provoke, lead, cajole, and encourage but cannot guarantee that learning will occur. In their shared intimacy and their uncertainty, the community of learning and the community of art are similar. Merleau-Ponty describes the encounter with the work of art as follows.

A painter like Cézanne, an artist, a philosopher, must not only create and express an idea, but must awaken the experiences which will enroot the idea in the consciousness of others. If the work is a success, it has the strange power to teach itself [to others]. Following the markings of the painting or the book, by setting up the stepping stones [*recoupements*], in bumping from side to side, guided by the confused clarity of a style, the reader or spectator finishes by discovering that which the artist wanted to

⁵³Greene, "Reflection and Passion in Teaching," 80.

communicate. The painter can do no more than construct an image. He must wait for this image to enliven itself for others.⁵⁴

The connection of teaching to the arts is not based merely in Greene's understanding of teaching as creative—open and incapable of reduction to any set of behaviors. In addition, teaching has its community within which it works, within which it works its changes. Greene likens the teacher to the sculptor in that both are engaged in transmuting and illuminating material. This is to be understood in two ways. Not only do artists and teachers "transmute and illuminate" the physical world as they show students things they had not before seen, but they "transmute and illuminate" the community within which they work as they come to new visions. The act of the teacher is always situated within some community.

Greene understands that teachers and artists can "take their audiences (or students) on a journey through a work of art, pointing to those aspects of their principles or guiding concepts that make it possible for them to see."⁵⁵ When the student comes to "see" the work of art, the student then enters into a community with the artist and with those others who see. They have seen what the artist (teacher) tried so hard to help them see.

⁵⁴Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Le Doubt de Cézanne," in *Sens et Non-Sens* (Paris: Éditions Nagel, 1948), 36-7; "Cézanne's Doubt," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert Dreyfus and Patricia Dreyfus (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 19-20.

⁵⁵Maxine Greene, "Significant Landscapes: An Approach to the Arts in Interrelationship," in *Landscapes of Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 206.

Education For Freedom

Though, perhaps, some persons may be satisfied with an individual reconceptualization of the world that they share with no one else, the teacher lives and works within a complex social realm. A teacher cannot be satisfied with a change that affects only herself. For Greene, "education is fundamentally concerned with assisting the human being to adjust to his environment and to reshape it as he lives."⁵⁶ It is this "power " (as Dewey calls it) of adjustment within an environment that is freedom. The teacher must see "change" as being necessarily part of his or her role. What kind of teacher would be satisfied to say at the end of the school year that all of his students left the classroom less able to adapt to their lived situations?

Greene is convinced that the encounter with literature can be a liberating experience that can lead to "wide-awakeness." She claims that most persons lead a life asleep; they are not aware of their potential for personal and social fulfillment through collective acts. One vital function of education is to provide the experiences necessary to shock people into a more critical awareness of themselves as situated within a specific cultural/historical period. Greene makes clear that she believes in the effectiveness of literature (well taught) to give people the critical awareness necessary to search out authentic acts of freedom. As one reviewer of *The Dialectic of Freedom* said, in the hands of Maxine Greene literature has the power, "once it has drawn us into another's eye, to defamiliarize our own terrain so that we can see it freshly."⁵⁷ This "fresh" vision

⁵⁶Greene, *Teacher As Stranger*, 158.

⁵⁷Madeleine Grumet, review of *The Dialectic of Freedom*, by Maxine Greene, *Journal of Higher Education* 61, no. 3 (May/June 1990), 350.

puts aside conventional understandings and allows the "chaos" and "mystery" of everyday life to be understood.

Throughout her work, Greene insists on the ability of literature and philosophy to educate people in a manner that helps them develop their own critical faculties, examine their routines from new perspectives, and, ultimately, develop their own projects for an authentic freedom within community. It is this concern for the full development of the person through authentic relationships to others within a community of shared work that Greene identifies as education for freedom.

Education for freedom cannot consist in the mere learning of facts. For Greene, education requires that students learn to resist the imposition of meanings from outside of themselves. Education means to "open clearings for communicating across boundaries, for choosing, for becoming different. . . ." ⁵⁸ It is by educating students about and in the arts that this becomes possible. As students engage in the processes of doing art, they come to understand that the "art world is always a constructed world." It is a world that must be always "contingent and open to critique." ⁵⁹ This kind of education cannot be had by merely running children through a museum, or in teaching them the meter of a sonnet. Rather, the experience of art must be of the first-hand experience of doing art. "When students can share in . . . entering the symbol system of novel writing and story weaving . . . [.] all the immediate involvements lead to a participant kind of knowing and participant sort of engagement with art forms themselves." ⁶⁰ Greene is convinced that coming to see the world not as fixed but

⁵⁸Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 135.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 137.

as the active construction of communities of people requires an education that involves students in that act of communal construction. An education in fixity, one that requires only passivity and memorization on the part of students, can never reveal the fluid nature of the world they inhabit. Students must be made to see the constructed nature of history, of government, of community itself. Only an education that can "release the imagination" of students can provide them with "the capacity to look *through* the windows of the actual, to bring as-ifs into being in experience."⁶¹

This kind of education requires first-hand experience of the arts, according to Greene. "As I view them, the arts offer opportunities for perspective, for perceiving alternative ways of transcending and of being in the world, for refusing the automatism that overwhelms choice."⁶² We should readily remember Thoreau's and Emerson's idea of "creative reading." Though Greene's Transcendental precursors wrote about literature rather than art in general, Greene too holds a special place for literature. The kind of generous reading that Thoreau demands of his readers is surely an invitation to the reader, an invitation to an active and co-constructive involvement in Thoreau's work. His writing is replete with demands that his readers make choices, resist the traditional, envision alternatives, and transcend the given. Greene understands the ecstatic nature of Thoreau's writing. She says of Thoreau's reading of the ancient classics that, "To read was another way of opening oneself to the world and the possibilities in the world. It could lead to an awakening, to taking a new,

⁶¹Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 140.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 142.

creative chance."⁶³ This is the education in reading that both Greene and Thoreau envision. "To read this way, to engage in the past and make it one's own, was to see oneself in perspective, to extend life beyond routine."⁶⁴

Conclusion and Critique

Many of Maxine Greene's claims about freedom and democratic society are similar to Dewey's. Both Dewey and Greene reject the Lockean liberal dichotomy between the individual and society. Both deeply understand the role of critical and creative intelligence in the process of living one's freedom. Both understand that education for freedom cannot go on in schools where ideas are taught in isolation from the needs and lives of students. What Greene adds to Dewey is a well-developed prescription for the use of literature in education, a deep understanding of how history influences human freedom, and the pedagogical use of an ecstatic vision of democratic society.

Greene recognizes that schools too often are infected with a social inertia that restricts the search for real democracy.

Rather than being challenged to attend to the actualities of their lived lives, students are urged to attend to what is "given" in the outside world—whether in the form of "high technology" or the information presumably required for what is called "cultural literacy."⁶⁵

⁶³Maxine Greene, *The Public School and the Private Vision: A Search for America in Education and Literature* (New York: Random House, 1965), 82.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 7.

Dewey diagnosed the same malady decades earlier. He found the mass of Americans indifferent to their own lives. "Indifference is the evidence of current apathy, and apathy is testimony to the fact that the public is so bewildered that it cannot find itself."⁶⁶ The explanation behind this "indifference" is manifold: a political system that alienates voters, a system of business that routinely makes decisions not in the interests of workers or the larger society, and the rapid change in values brought on by a raging technology that no one seems to be able to control. Thoreau diagnosed this malady nearly a century before Dewey and called it a life of "quite desperation" driven by an obsession with business. Dewey, Greene, and Thoreau know that if people are to be engaged in truly democratic social interactions, if people are to find their own way, open the spaces of their own lives, they must be educated to do so.

Nonetheless, I remain sceptical about Greene's assertion that by engaging in more and better aesthetic education the nation will be freer. In fact, the research evidence that does exist seems to indicate that Green's claims for the power of the arts are overly optimistic. To see how some fictional character faces the difficulties of life, identifies the impediments to freedom, and overcomes them, does not tell students how to accomplish the same things in their own lives. In fact, fictional stories are ubiquitous in modern America. Certainly, with the advent of television, the number of fictional stories that most Americans come in contact with is now much greater than before. Have Americans thereby been more able to see possibilities more developed in their own lives? Greene expressly assumes that by seeing possibility in art, the masses of people will come to see the possibility of their own lives, politics, homes, and community. If

⁶⁶Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 122-3.

this is true, we would hope to find some modicum of research that supports Greene's contention.

Greene claims that exposure to literature can inform people how better to live their freedom. This process of using information gleaned from the lives of fictional characters for one's own life resembles the much studied process of transfer of learning. Research into the process of the transference of problem-solving skills from one mode of action into another shows how exceedingly difficult this process is. An extensive meta-analysis of research into the possibility of transfer concludes that "problem-solving transfer seems to be rare. Laboratory studies have shown that learning how to solve a problem often does not help students solve a subsequent problem that looks different but can be solved in the same way."⁶⁷ Greene admits that there is a powerful social inertia that "mystifies" human life, that posits "chaoses" that actively resist understanding. How is it that the exposure to the arts is adequate to overcome the essential inertia that arguably remains vastly more powerful than the "envisioning abilities" of most persons? What lends this social inertia its power and how might one actually reduce it in the society as a whole? These questions Greene does not answer.

Greene does not seem to understand that art itself may fall victim to the powers that resist freedom. We have seen already how James Fenimore Cooper's series of novels (the Leatherstocking tales) that were intended as a critique of bourgeois liberalism instead came to be understood as emblematic of that liberalism. We saw that Natty Bumpoo, who Cooper intended as a critique of the

⁶⁷ Richard Mayer and Merlin Wittrock, "Problem-Solving Transfer," in *Handbook of Educational Psychology*, ed. David Berliner and Robert Calfee (New York: Macmillan Library References, Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996), 51. This article is an excellent summary of the latest research into the problem of transferring problem-solving abilities from one realm of life into another.

values of American liberalism, became the archetype of those values. Many works of art that begin as explicit critiques of our culture become powerful partisans for the mainstream values of our culture. Andy Warhol's Pop Art originally functioned as a critique of mindless consumerism; it became an advertising style much admired by large corporations. Rock music, which was in large part a music of rebellion, now functions as background music for many television advertising campaigns. Even figures as acerbic as Mark Twain and William Burroughs have been reduced to reassuring grandfather-figures in our culture. The arts can and have served the functions of resistance and critique. However, given but a little time, these works of art seem to lose their vital critical function and, instead, come to serve the power that would constitute the "chaoses" to which Greene refers. When art itself lacks the ability to resist the forces of obfuscation and itself falls into sleep, how can it function to help awaken large groups of people to their freedom?

Greene's understanding of our responsibility to "wake-up," to come to more penetrating understanding of the world, lacks a large scale social/political analysis. She acknowledges that there is a social inertia that functions to keep us asleep, yet she provides no deep analysis of it. She does not explain how it functions and from where it derives its power. If Greene's claims for the power of art are to be substantiated, there must be additional support for the critical analysis of the "chaoses" of the world. For the arts to fulfill their function of liberation, they must be joined with a deep understanding of the powers that constitute the chaoses that resist interpretation and change.

In the final chapter, I hope to construct not a new or better understanding of democracy and freedom, for Dewey and Greene already provide a high quality exposition of these ideas. Rather, I will construct a detailed working out of a possible practice of education for freedom within the general parameters set

up by Dewey and Greene. This practice of education for freedom must take into account the power of our society to co-opt the forces assembled against it.

CHAPTER NINE
WHITE NOISE OR COMMUNICATION: REGAINING THE
LANGUAGE OF FREEDOM

It was the black billowing cloud, the airborne toxic event It is surely possible to be awed by the thing that threatens your life, to see it as a cosmic force, so much larger than yourself, more powerful, created by elemental and willful rhythms. This was a death made in the laboratory, defined and measurable, but we thought of it at the time in a simple and primitive way, as some seasonal perversity of the earth like a flood or tornado, something not subject to control. Our helplessness did not seem compatible with the idea of a man-made event.

—Don DeLilo, *White Noise*

Don DeLilo calls it “white noise” and symbolizes it as an “airborne toxic event.” Maxine Greene reminds us that Virginia Woolf calls it a “nondescript cotton wool,” and Greene calls it a “chaos.” It is a life that seems to have somehow gained a direction we did not choose, a vague tissue of indistinctions over which we lack control. This diagnosis is not new. John Dewey calls it the “eclipse of the public.” Thoreau understands it and names it our “quiet desperation.” Have people always lived within an all-pervasive white noise of society that leaves so little room for active initiative, so little place for active discussion and freedom? Dostoyevski’s *Brothers Karamotsov* has its justly famous scene where the Grand Inquisitor claims that humanity asks not for freedom but for security. Have we come so far from Locke’s social contract in which people give up some part of their freedom in return for security? Aldous Huxley, in *Brave New*

World, shows a far future world controlled by mind numbing soma, a televangelical religious mania, and forced adaptation to one's life. Past and present, there seems no way out. Certainly, modern philosophers and writers have repeatedly warned of this particular human peril, this inability for authentic communication and cooperation.

How can people find freedom within the white noise generated by the corporate-consumer culture? Is there a project of education that can help people engulfed by this white noise find freedom. Within a culture of white noise, nothing stands out. It becomes almost impossible for most people to speak in a way that others can hear. The ambient noise is too loud. "Dogs love trucks," we are assured by the little man in the Toyota advertisements. The victories of sports teams share newspaper headlines with department store sales and stories of mass starvation in Africa. It all seems the same. Maxine Greene wants to wake us from this torpor. Greene wants to bring people to see the tangled matrix that is our "meaning-world." She wants people to trace out the fine connections, to map the world so as to discover the deeper meanings in their lives and thereby to render them amenable to conscious manipulation. But does it even make sense to speak of freedom within this all-consuming white noise? The noise of our society relentlessly functions to overwhelm meaningful discussion.

As we have already seen, American education functions to instill the ideals of Lockean liberalism: the God-given nature of freedom, the antithetical relation between freedom and social organization, and a psychology of radical autonomy. In spite of the attempts of various American philosophers, the Lockean liberal idea of freedom still dominates throughout most of American thought. Nonetheless, the American Transcendentalists actively posited an alternative freedom. They found

freedom in their obedience to the laws of nature. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau proposed that nature could function (for those persons who allowed it to) as a complex symbol, teaching of the possibility of transformation and redemption. They understood that freedom could not be the natural estate of humanity, but, rather, was possible only within a community that was open to the teachings of the natural world. John Dewey thoroughly repudiates Lockean liberalism and, in its place, demands that freedom must consist in the power to conceive of alternatives to the present situation and to bring these alternatives into reality. He accompanies this idea of freedom with a critical understanding of the way modern society tends to frustrate attempts at freedom. Maxine Greene proposes that the arts have a powerful ability to cut through the social routine that frustrates the human ability to identify viable alternatives.

In this final chapter, I will suggest a three-part program of education for freedom, a program for reducing the noise and increasing meaningful communication. The first part requires that American history be seen and taught differently with regard to its prime document of freedom: the Constitution. This is a means of changing the meaning of the past and thus necessitating change in the future. The second recommendation is for a greater breadth of experience in education. Greater experience works to discount simplistic understandings of the world. With greater experience, what is otherwise an indecipherable noise, worthy only of being ignored, can become intelligible signs that enable students to take into account, and thus exercise some control over, their lives. Thirdly, I recommend a thorough reorientation of the language of education—away from the literal and toward the metaphorical.

Regaining the Past as a Method of Freeing the Future

When Locke wrote the first of his *Two Treatises of Government*, he did more than merely argue against Sir Robert Filmer's justificatory scheme of the divine right of kings to rule. Filmer, as had many thinkers before him, looked to the Bible to support his argument. He claimed that God had created the medieval system of rulership, and thus it was not (and could never be) the province of human beings to interfere with that system. Filmer's understating of biblical history disallowed all other interpretations. He participated in substantiating what Greene calls a chaos and what others call white noise, cotton wool, or quiet desperation. When Locke dared to posit that Filmer had gotten it wrong, that history supported not a vision of kingly rule but a vision of bourgeois community, that act was thoroughly radical. By engaging in a creative reading of the Bible, Locke broke through the white noise that hindered alternative understandings. Central to the success of his claim as to the inherent (and God-given) nature of freedom is Locke's ability to take hold of history itself and to re-interpret it. The past was not a lesson in obedience to divinely upheld royalty, rather it was a lesson in the fundamental dignity and right of all rational men to choose an alternative form of life. Locke successfully seized the past from more conservative thinkers; he cut the ground of their support from under them; he created a past that supported his own vision of democratic society. So long as the past compels present human actions (and it must), the ability to change in the present comes largely from the ability to change the past. According to Locke, God had created man in his own image and given freedom to rational men. The only legitimate form of government was one

in which people freely chose that government. By creating a powerfully convincing alternative past, Locke created a powerful motive force that gave birth to a new set of social relations that could have otherwise existed.

Creative Reading and the Creation of the Past

Maxine Greene acknowledges the connection between history and present freedom when she asserts that writers of literature "may well create their own precursors and, in so doing, change our views of certain earlier work."¹ Merleau-Ponty understands that no system of philosophy and no history ever can be complete. Philosophy and history, like the work of literature (or art) always can be the condition for the arousal of more thoughts than are already contained within it.² The world is by its nature incomplete. There always remains the possibility of finding therein something new. As history is re-interpreted, that new history itself comes to demand a new set of human responses. Merleau-Ponty explains that history is not an external and absolute guide for human events (as Hegel and Marx would have it); rather, history always emanates from within the course of things. The logic of the development of history is made clear only

¹Maxine Greene, "The Rational and the Emancipatory: Towards a Role for Imaginative Literature," in *Landscapes of Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 26.

²Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 199.

as living people understand and experience it.³ Should that understanding and experience of history be changed, the present understanding and experience of life must also change. Locke achieved this through a creative reading of history and, thereby, necessitated that human events take up a new and revolutionary course.

To the extent that we can revision the past, we are better able to direct our present and future course of life. To the extent that the past is fixed in its meaning, living people are confined within the already existing direction of events. Here lies the power of Thoreau's and Emerson's creative reading in the provisioning of freedom. One may even come to think of creative reading as the doing of philosophy, for philosophy "is never content to accept its historical situation. . . . It changes this situation by revealing it to itself and therefore, by giving it the opportunity of entering into conversation with other times and other places. . . ."⁴ This conversation is possible only when people engage in the creative reading of the past. In creatively reading books (of philosophy, or literature, or history, or whatever), "one can always recover from the book the fragments of history on which it has crystallized, and this is really necessary in order to know to what extent it has changed them in their truth."⁵ Further, Merleau-Ponty realizes that the truth of any text is never complete; there always is a further meaning that may be derived from it. The "new facts" found in old books "are never absolutely outside their province [the province of the original

³Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "In Praise of Philosophy," in *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. John Wild and James Edie (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 51.

⁴*Ibid.*, 57.

⁵*Ibid.*

text] but call forth new echoes from them and reveal new lustres in them.”⁶ Thus we must come to see that freedom cannot be concerned merely with the future or even with the present and the future. It is through creative reading that we may add a new “lustre” to an old book (as, for example, Locke did). Yet, the new “echoes” are firmly within the province of that text; it only requires the right mind to bring them out.

Re-visioning America's Past

Locke understood the centrality of a single great document—The Bible—that stood in the way of freedom at the end of the seventeenth century. At the end of the twentieth century, America has an equivalent single document that, with the popular understanding of it, prevents any furthering of thought concerning the nature of freedom. That document is the U. S. Constitution. As we saw in Chapter Four, there is no single document more widely studied by American school children, and this document is routinely explained from within the Lockean liberal perspective. Within this perspective, freedom is a given; there is no need for its development. So long as the Constitution continues to be so understood (or misunderstood) there can be no positive development of the popular idea of freedom. Thus a first task must be a revisioning of the Constitution and the spread of this new vision to the younger generation through the schools and popular culture. A new history is required in order that there may be a new freedom.

At the end of the twentieth century, the U. S. Constitution functions in the same way as did the Bible at the end of the seventeenth century. Both

⁶Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard McCleary (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 11.

actively limit the idea of freedom by promulgating a white noise that resists interpretation. A modern public education that interpreted the Constitution as an open framework within which people must collectively build their freedom, rather than as the most complete and perfect statement of freedom, could powerfully alter most American's idea of freedom. Should there not be such a change in American education, there seems to be little hope that most Americans are capable of transcending the narrow parameters of freedom set by Lockean liberalism.

The Necessity of Experience in Education

That people generally find it difficult, or impossible, to come to alternative understandings of the world should not be surprising. People are slow to abandon ideas that have demonstrated some practical efficacy. Chomsky observes that "Ideas that yield understanding and insight are judged legitimate, part of the presumed truth about the world."⁷ However, should the range of experience and application of any person be sufficiently limited, he or she will be satisfied if the available ideas provide understanding within that limited world view. Thus a set of ideas that are sufficient to allow the person to understand mass-circulation newspapers and news magazines, TV news, and converse with neighbors about the latest Hollywood movies, will be given the status of truth. It may be the case that only when some wider experience demonstrates the inability of already accepted ideas to adequately explain the world that people will begin to doubt the truth of their previously accepted ideas. So long as this wider

⁷Noam Chomsky, *Language and Thought* (Wakefield, Rhode Island: Moyer Bell, 1993), 40.

experience is lacking, the limited and parochial ideas that explain limited experience functions as a nearly invisible limitation of freedom.

Overt exercise of tyrannical fiat is easy to identify as an infringement of freedom. Discovering how one's own ideas limit one's freedom is a much more difficult task. Typically, one does not know that one does not know. Ignorance is largely invisible.⁸ Thus part of education must be to provide divergent experience, a set experiences that are not well explained using a parochial set of ideas. As was seen in the previous chapter, Maxine Greene hopes that the reading of literature will provide exactly such upsetting experiences. Dewey, of course, insists on the centrality of experience in all education.

How is "experience" to be understood?

The true "stuff" of experience is recognized to be adaptive courses of action, habits, active functions, connections of doing and undergoing; sensori-motor co-ordination. Experience carries principles of connection and organization within itself. These principles are none the worse because they are vital and practical rather than epistemological.⁹

Dewey understood long ago that people's lives are not lived in the mind but in the flesh. The experience of life needs no artificial organization in order to function as corrective. Experience can take many particular forms in order to teach particular lessons. However, there is one trait above all others that experience must retain if it is to count as experience at all. That trait consists in responsibility for consequences. Removing students from the consequences of their own actions is to deny them real experience and,

⁸Tomasz Szkuclarek, *The Problem of Freedom in Postmodern Education* (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1993), 77.

⁹John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, enlarged ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), 91.

thus, to deny the educative function of experience. Only in a society in which young people are sheltered from taking genuine responsibility can the ersatz experience of passive education hold, in comparison, any arguable claim to being educative.

Dewey understands that the provision of properly educational experience in schools is "a more difficult affair to conduct successfully than it is to follow the patterns of traditional education."¹⁰ This is so because teachers, along with most other persons, are caught within a set of operational habits that allow them to do their jobs. Students typically come to "institutionalize" their passive methods of learning just as teachers typically institutionalize their passive methods of teaching, and so both student and teacher accommodate the requirements of institutionalized learning. And though some experiences can function to help break students out of their passivity and lack of genuine curiosity, this can create a problem for the community as students find fault with their parents, the community, and their teachers. If a culture truly values freedom, it must be prepared to accept that some of its values and practices must be criticized and eventually changed.

Remember that narrow experience is all that is necessary to successfully employ narrow ideas. A school in which none of the students fail is a school in which none of the students are made to bear responsibility for their own actions. In such a system, teachers and "schools" are made to take a responsibility that can never be truly theirs alone. In much of modern education, there is the assumption that all knowledge can be broken into a progressive series of easily learned bite-sized pieces. No room

¹⁰John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier, 1963), 39.

is given to discovery learning, the spontaneous, and the fortuitous. In other words, the individuality is removed from experience. When this occurs, the authenticity (and thus the power) of the experience for the student is eviscerated.

No philosopher wrote more or more forcefully of the centrality of experience to education than did Dewey. He understood that the original connection and continuing relation between people and the world is in life itself, rather than in the objectified and reified reality of books and school "subjects" such as history, literature, and mathematics. Dewey knew that the lived experience has greater power to engage students' minds than does any book or other derivative artifact. "Why not give the child the reality with its much larger sweep, its intenser forces, its more vivid and lasting value for life. . . ?"¹¹ And any concern that real-life experience could somehow be less demanding than rigorous book-work is dismissed by Dewey. "There is no discipline in the world so severe as the discipline of experience subjected to the tests of intelligent development and direction."¹²

Metaphor as the Invitation to Intimacy and Community

There is good reason to believe that educators must attend to the language of education. Some forms of writing and speech function in an overtly anti-democratic manner: they close down discussion, limit possible

¹¹John Dewey, *The School and Society*, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1915); reprint (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1956), 155.

¹²Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 90.

interpretations, and instantiate a single meaning. Similarly, there are other forms of communication that seem to invite the reader into a more intimate connection with the writer: they open discussion, encourage alternative interpretations, and frustrate attempts to instantiate any single meaning. Compare any high school history text with Thoreau's *Walden* and this distinction becomes immediately clear.

Historically, Western culture has feared the power of possibility and interpretation in language. Examples of this fear of interpretation are numerous. The Church for many centuries tightly controlled who could interpret the Bible by refusing to allow for its translation into vernacular languages. And even John Locke shows a contempt for the use of metaphorical language in philosophy. In the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he claims that "all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment, and so indeed are perfect cheats. . . ."¹³ In making this statement, Locke aligns himself with the basic mistrust of metaphor in philosophy that can be traced from Plato into the twentieth century. "The works of many twentieth-century positivist philosophers and others either state or imply that metaphors are frivolous and inessential, if not dangerous and logically perverse. . . ."¹⁴ Modern philosophers including A. J. Ayer and Jurgen Habermas believe that if human language could be used in a sufficiently precise manner, many (if not all) of the problems of philosophy could be resolved.

¹³John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk. 3, chap. 10.

¹⁴Ted Cohen, "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy," in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 3.

Merleau-Ponty explains something of philosophy's resistance to metaphorical language when he says that language has the power to make itself be forgotten; language lulls its users into the belief that they engage in the exchange of pure meanings rather than in a complex symbol system. This is particularly true of "literal" language. Metaphor, on the other hand, brings the language user back to the language itself and thus actively resists the tendency of language to make itself be forgotten. That is, metaphor draws attention to the language itself. Didactic instruction through the use of literal language encourages the forgetting of language and the consequent belief that ideas themselves are being conveyed. These "pure" ideas are easily perceived as ready-formed and as requiring merely that students absorb them passively. Metaphorical language, on the other hand, works against such passivity as it invites and engages the student into the active process of meaning giving. As language comes to be understood not as literal but as metaphorical, as a cooperative construction, the power of language to make itself be forgotten and thus to function as a "chaos" (to use Greene's term) or as "white noise" (to use DeLilo's) is reduced. School instruction that employs metaphor can facilitate student control and participation in the construction of the meaning of language.

There is some evidence that children possess a powerful capacity to employ metaphor and that this power tends to decline through the years of formal schooling. Pre-school children around four to five years of age perform better than do children three to five years their seniors. The younger children do not resist the transgression of customary boundaries of language usage and "find the wordplay enjoyable rather than tension-

arousing."¹⁵ Most children from the age of about six until the age of 10, have great difficulty in understanding and working with metaphors. The quality of the metaphors produced and understood by children after the age of 10 only slowly improves.¹⁶ Though there is no research to support a claim that schooling actually inhibits or reduces children's use of metaphor, one may wonder whether this is, indeed, the case. The transition from a more playful approach to language in early childhood to a more propositional form in primary schools may instill in children a preference for the settled and literal over the open and metaphorical.

Ted Cohen claims, rightly I believe, that the use of metaphor aims at the achievement of intimacy between the user and hearer or reader. He argues that in order for metaphor to be fully understood by another person, there must already exist a level of intimacy. Further, the metaphor then "invites" the other to yet a deeper level of intimacy. In understanding that a metaphor has been uttered or written, one "employs a number of assumptions about the speaker: what the speaker believes, what the speaker believes about what the hearer believes (which includes beliefs about what the speaker thinks the hearer can be expected to believe about the speaker)."¹⁷ Cohen does not deny that literal language can be put to

¹⁵Howard Gardner and Ellen Winner, "The Development of Metaphoric Competence: Implications for Humanistic Disciplines," in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 132.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Cohen, "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy," 6. It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that the active growth of freedom in the eighteenth century coincided with the creation of a new and psychologically intimate genre of writing: the novel.

intimate uses. Nonetheless, it is in the use of metaphorical language that people can "initiate explicitly the cooperative act of comprehension which is, in any view, something more than a routine act of understanding."¹⁸ In the presentation of metaphorical language, there is the realization that not all persons will understand; metaphor functions to exclude as well. Figurative language "can be inaccessible to all but those who share information about one another's knowledge, beliefs, intention, and attitudes."¹⁹ Nonetheless, this exclusionary property of metaphor is not based in fiat but in knowledge. Anyone excluded is at the same time invited to overcome their exclusion through a process of coming into greater knowledge.

Something different goes on when teachers present literal, rather than metaphorical, information to students. Because of the limited knowledge of most school children and because of their inability to successfully search out alternative meanings and sources, most modern (didactic and literal) instruction expressly inhibits student participation in meaning creation. Education traditionally uses propositional language, the language of facts. Thus, students are not engaged in the construction of knowledge but only in its absorption. This need to pay attention to the language of education is something that Emerson, Thoreau, and Greene understand. We have been calling it creative reading. By focusing on the literary and metaphorical, education can be more than the mere provisioning of some already processed information. Rather, education

¹⁸Cohen, "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy," 7.

¹⁹Ibid.

can, through the use of a "language of freedom," actively engage students in the creation of meaning.

That freedom should require a form of language different from a language of domination, should not be surprising. To dress freedom in imperious tones is to destroy freedom. A language of education that speaks in ready-made certainties cannot be conducive of freedom. Rather, such language insists upon its own completeness and correctness. It allows very little space for the active participation of students. Socrates must have understood something of this, considering his insistence upon teaching through the use of questions. Language that shows itself to be incomplete, in need of completion, in need of the active participation of the student, invites the student's participation. Metaphorical language is, by its nature, incomplete. It seeks its completion in the other. It is amenable to the work of students in the process of its own completion. As students understand the radically open nature of metaphorical language, they are better able to understand their own role in language, communication, and in democratic society. The false claims to completeness explicit in autocratic language can be understood as pretentious, exclusionary, and as an assault upon the freedom of the student. Metaphorical language is democratic and, so, is encouraging of freedom.

As American educators at the close of the twentieth century, our primary responsibility is to open the world to our students. We must help them to construct their own freedom. In order to accomplish this task, we must discover and neutralize those social practices that generate a white noise and thus impede real education. I have found three important sources of white noise that impede education for freedom: the facile interpretation of the Constitution, a lack of authentic student experience,

and an imperious language of instruction. By re-visioning the Constitution, we open a new past and thus necessitate a new future. By broadening experience, we undermine parochial ideas and explanations. And by giving a metaphorical voice to education, we contravene the imperious claims of language to the status of objectivity and fixity. This program of education for freedom is not complete; teachers can do more. However, in all of these ways, teachers can profitably work to open students to themselves, to the world, and to their own freedom.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Paul Martin Jurczak was born in 1954 into a working-class family in San Diego, California. He was educated through high school in the public schools of San Diego. After high school, he spent several years working in various blue-collar jobs in San Diego, San Francisco, and Tacoma, Washington. In 1981 he completed his B.A. degree in philosophy at the University of California, San Diego. At UCSD Mr. Jurczak sat on the student government, was a member of the radical "new indicator" collective which published a weekly, alternative, student newspaper, and was active in numerous protests.


Having developed a taste for radical journalism, Mr. Jurczak enrolled at the University of Kansas, William Allen White School of Journalism. Mr. Jurczak further challenged himself by enrolling also in the department of philosophy. In addition to the two degree programs, he completed nearly 30 hours of credit in each of three other departments: French, education, and dance. He received his M.S. in journalism in 1984, writing a thesis on journalistic objectivity. He completed his M.A. in philosophy in 1989, writing a thesis concerning the phenomenology of dance. During these years Mr. Jurczak taught, at least half-time, and often three-quarter time at KU. After completing the two masters degrees, he felt the need to give back some of the education he had acquired and was accepted into the U.S. Peace Corps. For two years Mr. Jurczak served as both Professor of English at the Université du Tchad and Professor of English Education at the École

Normale Supérieure in N'Djamena, the capital of the Republic of Chad, Africa.


He began doctoral studies in the Department of Foundations of Education at the University of Florida in January, 1993. While in Gainesville, he taught, part-time, for both the University of Florida and Lake City Community College. His research interests include Piaget's use of metaphor and education for freedom. In August of 1997 Mr. Jurczak moved to Lansing, Michigan, where he is an Instructor of Philosophy and Humanities at Lansing Community College. He received his Ph.D. in foundations of education in December, 1997.

Dr. Jurczak intends to continue various non-academic activities while in Michigan, including wilderness backpacking and canoeing. He is also planing a return to Africa sometime in the next several years.

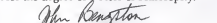
I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.


Robert Sherman, Chair
Professor of Foundations of Education


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Professor of Foundations of Education

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John Bengston
Associate Professor of Foundations of Education

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Thomas Auxter
Associate Professor of Philosophy

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the College of Education and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December, 1997


Chairman, Foundations of Education


Dean, College of Education

Dean, Graduate School